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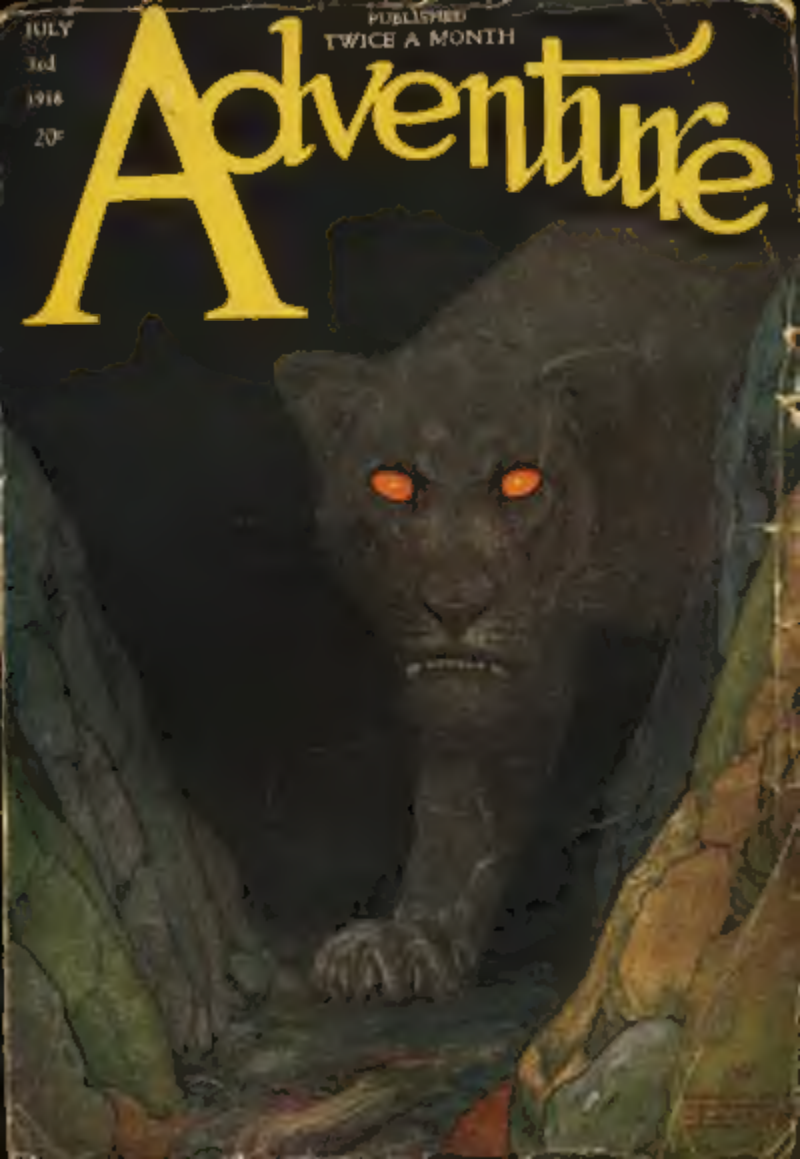

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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for Apr. 1, 1918. State of New York. County of New York. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York. Managing Editor ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, N. Y. *Stockholders:* THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. GEORGE B. BLACK, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Illinois. EMILY JOSEPHINE DONNER, Park House, Summit, New Jersey. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City, N. Y. CLARA E. KEHOE, 2344 University Avenue, New York City, N. Y. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, The Belnord, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Butterick Building, New York City. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)* THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, Spring and Macdougal Streets, N. Y. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, 128 West 59th Street, N. Y. R. W. POOR, 5th Avenue and 23rd Street, N. Y. MRS. J. O. HARDY, Tecumseh, Mich. MARTHA LEWIS, Westerville, Ohio. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of March, 1918. JAMES B. SHEEHAN, Notary Public. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1918.) Notary Seal.
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THE LIBRARY
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Adventure
July 3
1918
Vol. 18
No. 1

Mystery

A Complete Novel

by Crittenden Marriott

Author of "Protectors of the Peace."

CHAPTER I

BARE-HEADED, white-faced, with eyes so dark with anger that they looked like holes burned in a blanket, Russell Conway ran across the street and sprang up the entrance steps of the Chimneystack Building. In his hand he clutched the letter that had driven him from his room in the Electrolier Building across the way.

"He's here!" he panted, as he ran. "Here! Under my very eyes for weeks—weeks. And I never guessed. I never—guessed!"

Mason's flying fingers *tick-tacked* the last word. Then he clutched the "pull" and ran the typewriter carriage back to begin a new line and a new paragraph. But before he could resume his racing clatter on the keys a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Go slow, boy," warned a voice. "Go slow. The *Gazette's* got enough libel suits on hand to last it for a while. Your last effort brought it more than enough. Go slow."

Mason looked up and grinned. He was a lanky youngster, taller than the ordinary, with a pleasant if pale face and a pair of brown eyes that were altogether too beautiful for any man to possess—beautiful enough to serve as a danger flag for any woman. Fortunately for the sex, Billy Mason—except in the way of business, of course—was frightfully shy and was reputed never to have kissed a girl in his life.

Three minutes before, he had rushed into the city room of the *Gazette* and had hurled himself at his machine like a madman.

But he paused gracefully when his chief addressed him.

"Aw! Pshaw! Hibbs," he grunted. "Have a heart. My Vidocq-Holmes personality was working fine when you butted

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in. Libel suits are good advertisements for the *Gazette*. And, anyway, I'm not going to libel any one."

The city editor's knotty finger tapped the lines just imprinted on the paper.

"That looks like it, doesn't it?" he snorted.

"That? That isn't a circumstance to what I'm going to say before I get through. I'm going to give Mr. Russell Conway the devil and all. But I'm goin' to prove an alibi for him at the end. He couldn't possibly have killed Werder. I don't think he even knows who did kill him. But I'm betting high that he knows why he was killed. Anyway, he can't afford to sue; the last thing he'd want is to go on the witness-stand. But he's got to talk—and this'll make him."

"W-ell!" The city editor weakened. "Well, don't go too blamed hard, anyhow. Your detective tales from life are getting circulation for the *Gazette* all right. But even circulation can cost too much. So go easy!"

"Sure, Mike!"

With an impudent grin the reporter turned back to his machine.

SIX hours before he began to write the "story" that the city editor had interrupted, Mason slouched into the *Gazette* office and dropped into the chair before his desk. Meditatively he placed a sheet of paper in the machine. But he did nothing more. Hands on keys, he sat motionless, staring into vacancy with a look that the blindest could interpret.

"Billy's a thousand miles away," commented one of the reporters who sat waiting for assignments. "He's seeing things all right!"

Then, abruptly, the telephone bell on the city editor's desk rang sharply, with piercing insistence, as if calling to some more than usually imperative errand. The city editor dropped the pencil out of his mouth, reached for the receiver, and growled a raucous "Well?" into it, exactly as if he considered the call a personal insult. A moment later he picked up the ejected pencil and made a note on a pad, growled "All right" and hung up. Then he glanced sharply about the city room.

"Mason," he called.

Mason came, and into his hands the city editor thrust the top sheet from the pad.

"Perkins phones from headquarters murder or something, Chimneystack Apartments. You know where it is; hop to it and you'll beat the police. Perkins will follow," he rumbled.

"Right!"

Mason seemed half-way down the room before the editor had finished. His monosyllabic answer floated back over his shoulder. As he passed his desk he caught up a dozen loose sheets of yellow paper, and thrust them, folded, into his hip pocket, grabbed his overcoat, and—slammed the door behind him.

The Chimneystack Apartment Building was only a couple of blocks away and it did not take him long to reach it. As he pushed through the revolving doors into the lobby the elevator bell began to ring with furious shrillness. Simultaneously the door of the cage rattled back and the elevator boy, a strapping young darky, tumbled out and ran, as if for his life. His mouth was open and his eyes popping and his hair would evidently have been standing on end if nature had not positively forbidden it. Toward the entrance he charged and in another instant would have been gone.

But Mason blocked his way and thrust him back forcibly.

"Hey! Hold on, Cap'n," he protested. "Don't run over a man that way!"

The boy glanced at him, panting, but hesitating in spite of himself.

"You—you—you—" he panted.

"Thataboy." The reporter's tones were soothing. "The man that did the trick is a long way from here now. He can't catch you—unless he's watching for you outside the door."

The darky jumped.

"Whar—whar he?" he demanded. "I ain't 'fraid er no man. But that ghos'——"

"Oh! The ghost's gone, too. No ghost is allowed to show himself more than once a day in an apartment building in New York. That's the mayor's latest order. Besides, ghosts don't ring bells! When a bell begins to ring it's a sign that the ghost has gone. Here—" the reporter slipped a coin into the boy's hand—"get back in your cage and take me up."

Mason flung back the lapel of his coat and showed a reporter's badge, which looked not unlike a police badge.

"What floor was it on?"

Once reassured about the ghost the boy's

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panic began to yield rapidly. The touch of the coin helped, and the sight of the badge completed his subjugation. Meekly he went back to his cage.

The elevator was old-fashioned and slow, a fact for which Mason blessed his stars.

"Tell me all you know, Sam," he ordered, imperatively, as the car started upward. "Who's killed?"

"Killed? There ain't nobody killed?"

"Nobody k—say! Don't you lie to me, boy. What you running for if nobody's killed."

"'Cause of the ghos', Boss! Dat's what."

"Whose ghost?"

"I dunno, and that's the God's truth, please, suh. You ask Mr. Conway about it. He knows. He come a-runnin' in 'bout half an hour ago like a crazy man; and he says, 'You git me up to Werder's room quick, or I'se a-goin' to cut your heart out.' An' I run him up quick, to the sixth, an' he hops out and hammers on Mr. Werder's door. But nobody didn't answer, an' the do's locked, an' he hammers harder'n harder. An' then Mr. Armour—he's the manager—comes a-runnin' up the steps an' he—dar he is now, Boss!"

Peering through the grill the reporter saw a short, swarthy man running down the stairs that encircled the elevator shaft. He was making no effort to stop the car—he seemed, indeed, not to notice it.

The elevator boy, however, made a move to stop; but before he could complete the motion the reporter roared a "go on" into his ear; and in mechanical obedience he thrust back the half-reversed controller and sent the car speeding upward. Also he resumed his interrupted story.

"An' Mr. Armour come runnin' up the steps, an' then I hears a scream, an' somethin' falls kerplunk in Mr. Werder's room; an' then the ghos' begins to whistle an' I comes away from there mighty quick."

"Whistle!"

"Yassah! He done whistle mighty ghos'-like. An' I comes down to the bottom an' waits. I done reckon the ghos' couldn't git into mah cage."

With the last word the boy stopped the elevator and shot back the iron door.

No one was in the hall. The door nearest to the elevator was shut, but the next door, only a few feet away, stood wide; and to it the reporter hastened. A glance showed that it opened into an apartment that was furnished, indeed, but that had an air of being swept and garnished rather than tenanted. Farther in, the wreck of a broken door appeared in the portal it had once closed.

Certain that he was on the right track, the reporter hurried toward the opening. Nearly he had reached it when he trod on something that rolled beneath his feet. Without pausing he stooped and caught the object up, saw at a glance that it was a rounded fragment of wood broken from the wrecked door, and hurried on, without even stopping to throw it down.

AN INSTANT more and he was at the doorway, looking in, half-screened by the jagged part of the broken door which still clung to the hinges.

On the floor, in front of the window, lay the body of a man, either unconscious or dead. Above him, with his back to the reporter, another man stood staring down. The reporter stared, too, with quick, indrawing breath.

The dead man was above the average in size. His face was strong, with a powerful undershot jaw, thick sensual lips, and high cheekbones. In coloring he was blond; his mustache, eyebrows and hair were all light colored, almost sandy. Alive, with the blood pulsing beneath his cheeks, he must have been good-looking and probably attractive to many—perhaps very attractive to a few.

Even dead he would not have looked repulsive had it not been for the look in his eyes. This the reporter was not close enough to read in its entirety, but he somehow got the instant impression that the man had died while looking upon some unbelievable horror.

The living man—clearly the Russell Conway of whom the elevator boy had spoken—did not hear the newspaper-man's approach. He seemed to be conscious of nothing except the body at his feet. Then, abruptly, he burst into a cackle of strident laughter.

"The beast!" he cried. "The foul beast that he is! Why didn't I know sooner? Why didn't I know? Oh, Edith! Edith! Poor little girl! Why didn't I know?"

For a time he stood motionless; then slowly he lifted his hand and stared at a letter, a mere crumpled wad of paper

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crushed by the pressure of his fingers. For a moment he seemed about to toss it from him; then, reconsidering, he thrust it into his pocket; and turned to the window.

So far the reporter had had no eyes except for the dead and for Conway. Now, with a start, he saw that the window was broken. The upper sash was down and both panes had been shattered, obviously by a small missile from without. Through both of them ran a good-sized hole, surrounded by jagged points of glass. Gaps in the circle showed where some of these points had been thrown bodily out of place to the floor.

Mason had had enough experience with gunfire to decide promptly that they had been made by a large, probably rather slow-moving, bullet.

Conway seemed not at all surprised to see them. Evidently he knew that they were there. Past them he stared blindly into the light. Mason guessed that he had noticed them when he first entered the room, before Armour had gone for help.

After a time Conway turned and looked once more at the body on the floor. Then, suddenly his eyes became fixed.

The reporter's gaze followed his and fastened on a ball of crumpled paper, superficially much like the letter that he had seen Conway thrust into his pocket a few moments before, so much like it, in fact, that the reporter thought that Conway must have missed his pocket and let the paper fall to the floor.

Evidently the same thought occurred to Conway, for he clapped his hand to his pocket; and then, as if convinced that real investigation was useless, he bent, snatched up the crumpled page, smoothed it out, and scanned it. As he did so, the reporter drew still farther back and screened himself more carefully.

Conway read the words on the paper and his form grew rigid. Scarcely he seemed to breathe. Then slowly his fingers tightened, crumpling the paper once more into a ball. Deliberately he bent and replaced it on the exact spot from which he had lifted it.

Simultaneously a babel of voices sounded in the hall. Conway did not seem to notice them. But the reporter came instantly out of his absorption and looked around. Then he felt a pain in his hand and, looking down, found that he was gripping a rounded piece of wood so strenuously that he had forced most of the blood out of his fingers. For an instant he stared at it wonderingly; then, suddenly realizing that it was the fragment that he had picked up as he entered, he bent and fitted it into the place from which it had evidently been jolted by the breaking down of the door.

As he slipped it in he noticed a damp spot on the floor and on the fringe of the rug. Swiftly he tore away several of the threads and then straightened up, just in time to see a miniature mob press into the room, pushing before it the same fat, swarthy little man whom he had seen running down the steps as he came up in the elevator and whom the elevator man had named as Armour, manager of the building.

At the moment the little man was striving to stay the advance of the invaders.

"Please! Please! Gentlemen!" he begged. "I give you right. You ain't got the business to come in till the police have come already. If you would listen a minute yet. You'll destroy the evidence. Please, gentlemen! Please!"

The reporter caught the little man as he was pushed upon him, swung him to one side and stepped into his place.

"Here!" he rasped, addressing the mob. "What you think you're doing? Stand back there. Stand back, I say." He flung back his coat permitting a glance—but no more than a glance—at his reporter's badge. "Stand back, I say."

As he finished Conway came hurrying up behind him; and the crowd stopped, with the instinctive obedience to authority common to crowds that lack a leader. Then it moved forward again, not intentionally, but forced on by a slow, almost unconscious pressure from those who were at the back.

Almost immediately, however, the police came—two uniformed "cops" and a plain-clothes man. Behind them followed a swarm of reporters among whom Mason saw Perkins, the regular police reporter of the *Gazette*. Roughly they forced their way through the throng, unceremoniously thrusting aside those who stood in their way.

As they neared Mason he greeted the plain-clothes man lightly—one might have said mockingly.

"Hello, Heber," he called. "Glad you've got here—at last."

The man he addressed scowled; but he did

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not answer. Turning, he spoke to the officers with him; and these instantly swept the would-be spectators out of the room into the hall and shut the door upon them. One stood guard there; the other hurried back to where Heber was standing, and took the latter's place at the inner door.

Over the wreck of the door, the plain-clothes man stepped into the death room, and nodded to Armour and to Conway. Then he turned back to the reporters.

"Sorry, boys!" he said. "I can't have you inside till the coroner's been here. There's too many of you. But you're welcome to watch from where you are."

Most of the newspaper men accepted the decision stoically. They were all old hands and knew the rules of the game. Mason alone protested. He too knew the rules, but he seemed to take an impish delight in baiting Heber. Plainly there was an old feud between the two.

"Oh! Have a heart, Heber," he protested. "Don't steal all the limelight. I've got to get some stuff for the *Gazette's* Sherlock Holmes to base a story on. Have a heart and let a fellow in."

HEBER seemed not even to hear the young fellow, unless a slight uplifting of the eyebrows was evidence of perception. Deliberately he turned his back and walked to the body and bent over it, studying it carefully but making no attempt to touch it or to search for a wound. At last he straightened up and looked from Conway to Armour—who was fidgeting with excitement—and back again.

Then he took out a notebook.

"You the manager?" he asked, addressing Armour. What's your name?"

"Armour—John Armour."

"Armour? Um! What nationality?"

The manager's face lightened.

"American," he declared, proudly. "I am American for twenty years. I come from Armenia with my father when I am a boy. I manage this building for five years."

"What's this man's name and what do you know about him?" He indicated the body.

"Werder. Frederick Werder. He is Swedish, I think. He is here in the house for four—five months. He pay prompt. Yesterday I meet him in the hall, an' he tell me he would be going away today. I tell him he ain't got no right to go without he give thirty days' notice; an' he say he pay instead."

"Um! Did he pay?" The detective's tone was sneering.

"No! He say he pay today."

"Um!" The detective turned to Conway. "Where do you come in?" he asked. "What's your name?"

Conway was ready.

"Russell Conway, real-estate," he answered. "Agent for this building. Mr. Werder dropped into my office several months ago inquiring for an apartment and I sent him here. More recently he has been inquiring about farms in the Northwest, particularly Wisconsin. I came around about an hour ago to tell him about one I had found."

"Well! What happened?"

"I was ringing at his door when Mr. Armour came up. Werder did not answer the ring and I knocked. Then I heard a scream and a heavy fall and nothing more. Later Armour and I broke in the other door and found him."

Conway pointed to the body.

Armour was dancing with excitement.

"He jump out of bed," he broke in. "He run to the window, and then—*pouf*—somebody shoot him. See!" He pointed to the shattered pane. "He just raise the blind and——"

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know? A question? I know because—because——"

The manager's assurance seemed to fail him and he swung despairingly on Conway.

"Ain't that what you said already?" he exclaimed.

Conway shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned to the detective.

"I was only guessing," he explained. "Werder seems to have jumped out of bed and run to the window to let up the blind——"

"How do you know it wasn't up already?"

"Maybe it was. But the gas is still burning—" he pointed to a jet beside the window—"and it seems more probable that he let up the blind, especially as the blinds on the other windows are down. It had to be up, of course, or the assassin couldn't have taken aim."

"Suppose there's a bullet-hole in the blind too?"

Conway hesitated.

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"That would make it probable that the shooting was an accident," he decided.

"Humph!"

The detective reached up, caught the pull and drew the blind down until its entire length was unrolled. From top to bottom no perforation appeared.

"Humph!" The detective swung 'round. "Have these sashes been moved—either of them?" he demanded, sharply.

"No!" Both Armour and Conway answered.

The detective stooped down and squinted through the two holes at the face of the building across the street, whose multitudinous windows stared blankly out. Obviously he was trying to determine the one from which the bullet must have come.

"Um! Um!" he said a moment later and made a note in his book.

Then he turned and scanned the opposite wall of the room for further signs of the missile. The wall, however, appeared to be unbroken—though of course a small rupture might easily be hidden amid the markings of the paper.

"Bullet's still in him, I guess," he observed. Then he looked at Conway again. "Anything else?" he asked.

Conway shook his head.

"Nothing," he answered.

The detective looked around; then, as Conway had done before him, he spied the ball of paper on the floor and picked it up.

Everybody watched as he opened it out and read it. But when, without a word of comment, he placed it in his pocket a howl of protest went up from the reporters.

Mason led the chorus.

"For the love of Mike!" he called. "Have a heart, Heber! Have a heart."

This time, however, the detective scored.

"You c'n say the police have got a clue pointing to astounding developments," he retorted, with a grin. "That ought to be enough for a kid with your imagination. Anybody that could put over a mixed-ale yarn like you did on the Hotchkiss case——"

"Aw! That's all right about the Hotchkiss case. I got——"

"'Course you did. You came darn near gettin' fired." The detective's tones were acid. "It's tough on all of us that you didn't come nearer—not much nearer, but just enough," he went on.

"Aw! You've got a grouch just because I——"

But the detective was no longer listening. He was hastening forward.

"Here! Boys! Let the coroner pass," he ordered, and fairly swept a passage through the group for a little fat man with a cold Wintry eye. "Good mornin', Doctor," he said.

"Good morning, Heber."

Dr. Windom glanced about him, sighted the body, and knelt down beside it and began to seek for the wound.

"Shot?" he asked.

"Yes sir. Mr. Armour, the manager, and Mr. Conway, agent for the building, were at the door when they heard him cry out and fall. They broke in and found him. They didn't hear the shot——"

"Where'd it come from?" Dr. Windom glanced up sharply.

"Seems to have come from the building across the way, sir. The bullet came through both sashes."

"Nonsense!" The doctor got up. For the moment he had finished his examination. "The man isn't shot at all. There's no sign of a wound on him."

An instant's hush—a hush of paralyzed astonishment—followed the coroner's declaration. Then came a shout of laughter, led by Mason.

"That's enough for a kid with my imagination, Heber," he barked. "You read the *Gazette* tomorrow and see if it isn't. So long, old man."

The young fellow was gone.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Mason left Werder's rooms he did not hurry to the *Gazette* office. He did not leave with the least intention of hurrying there. He left merely because he could not be in two places at the same time; and because he believed that he could learn more outside the rooms than inside them, even if he were admitted to them; and this last was improbable for hours, perhaps days, to come.

He had been first on the scene and had skimmed the cream of the tragedy before the other newspaper men had arrived; and he wanted to skim the cream from some correlative facts before they got around to them. Besides, Perkins, the *Gazette's* regular police reporter, was there; and Perkins was entirely competent to "cover" anything that might happen. So he bolted, with a jibe at

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Heber that he thought might fool his confrères and keep them from following him for a time.

Out of the door into the hall he dashed, wormed through the throng that still lingered in hope of gaining a morbid glance or two at the dead man, and broke for the elevator.

But he was not to escape so easily. Just as his finger pressed the button a woman who was watching Werder's door turned and saw him.

Instantly her face grew white as death and her eyes expanded till they seemed to fill her entire face.

"Mr. Mason," she breathed.

Mason turned to her.

"Why! Yes!" he said. "I'm Mr. Mason."

"And—and—you're alive?"

"Rather! Don't—I look it?" Mason's eyes twinkled.

The woman drew a long breath.

"I—heard you'd been killed in Europe," she said. "I'm glad the report was wrong."

"It wasn't very far wrong," returned the reporter, grimly. "However, a miss is as good as a mile. Who told you?"

His question plainly surprised the woman. Thoughtfully she scanned him.

"You've forgotten me entirely, haven't you?" she asked, suddenly.

Mason actually had forgotten her, though he found her face vaguely familiar. But of course he would not admit it.

"Not a bit of it," he protested. "I forgot a second only. It's been a long time since I saw you!"

Nodding brightly he turned and pressed the button once more.

The woman looked at him soberly, her vivacity of the moment before quelled.

"No! You don't remember me," she said, positively. "You've met me twice, though, perhaps you didn't recognize me the second time. The first time was when I was the Queen of the Serpents' Den in the side-show at Bingling's circus. Maybe you'll remember that!"

Mason did remember. It was his business to remember faces and ordinarily he would have remembered sooner.

"Of course I remember," he declared. "But that was—before the deluge—three years ago, at least. You wanted to leave the circus and go on the stage. As you're here I suppose you succeeded."

"Yes! I succeeded." The woman's tones were still subdued. "So you really didn't recognize me the second time," she mused. "Well!" her voice changed suddenly. "Oh! Well! What's the dif," she said. "Sure, I succeeded. I'm in vaudeville now—got ten weeks on the little big-time—four of it in New York and the rest on the road. I go out in a week. Say! Don't ring that bell so often. You make me nervous. If you want to get away, say so!"

Mason shook his head.

"Of course I don't want to get away," he protested, mendaciously. "But I really am in an awful hurry."

As a matter of fact the reporter was not so anxious to get away as he had been a moment before. Sensitive to impressions he had begun to feel more or less vaguely that the woman's appearance and her claim of former acquaintanceship had not come about altogether by chance. He had a "hunch" that she might prove valuable to him. On the other hand, time was flying.

"I really am in a tremendous hurry," he repeated. "We newspaper-men always are. And this murder——"

He paused expressively.

"Oh! Yes! The murder—" The woman caught her breath with a little gasp. "Tell me about it!"

Mason glanced furtively down the shaft. But the elevator gave no sign of its approach and he turned back.

"Well!" he said. "It was a jolly queer murder—if it was a murder at all!"

"If it was a murder?" Shrilly the woman's voice ran up the scale. "Wasn't it a murder? Ain't—ain't he dead?"

She broke off with a gasp.

"Oh! He's dead right enough," returned the reporter. "But whether he was killed is a question. The coroner hasn't been able to find any wound."

The woman's eyes widened.

"No wound?" she gasped. "Are you sure?"

"I'm not sure of anything. But the coroner seems to be. He can't find the bullet-hole—and even a coroner couldn't overlook a bullet-hole, could he?"

The woman did not smile.

"Do you mean that Mr. Werder was shot?" she demanded, anxiously.

"No! I'm just insisting that he most positively was not shot. We thought he was at first, you know, and——"

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"But—but—is there no other wound; not a bullet-wound but a little small wound——"

Abruptly the woman stopped.

"Maybe!" Mason shrugged his shoulders. "The autopsy'll tell. Er—where did you know Werder?"

The suddenness of the question caught the woman off guard.

"I?" she gasped.

Into her eyes there flashed a look of hate that the reporter never forgot. Then, in the blink of an eye it vanished; and her face expressed only mild distaste. "I don't know him except by sight," she said. "I've seen him going in and out of this building. I live on the floor below, you know. I didn't like his looks."

"Many a man's been hanged for his looks," rejoined Mason, cheerfully.

The tardy elevator rumbled to a stop behind him, and he turned toward it.

"Say," he added, hurriedly, pausing in the doorway. "I don't want to lose you now that we've met again. Can't you take supper with me after the show tonight. Probably I'll know a lot more about this case by then."

Eagerly the woman nodded.

"I'll be delighted," she declared. Very clearly the reporter's last words, if nothing else, had tempted her with their implied promise of information. "Stage door. 'Steenth and Broadway. My turn's over at 10:30."

"Right-o! I'll be there."

Mason nodded and stepped into the elevator. As it shot downward he saw the woman turn back toward the door of Werder's rooms.

Critically he pursed his lips.

"Now, how much do you know, lady?" he asked himself.

Then with a shrug of his shoulders he turned to pump the elevator boy vigorously but skilfully, as to the details of the events that had occurred in the building just previous to the discovery of the murder—details which, skilfully pieced together, would lend strong verisimilitude to a story that was shaping in his mind.

ONCE on the ground floor he strolled unhastily out of the building and crossed to the building across the street—the building that stared with its hundred blank eyes at the windows behind which the Werder tragedy had taken place. No longer was he thinking of the woman with whom he had just had speech. He would think of her again later. But for the moment he had no time. For the moment his work was practical; it belonged to fact, not fancy. In it he had to accumulate the details of the past on which he would erect the structure of his fancy.

Unhurriedly he entered the other building. The elevator was resting at the bottom and its door was open. Mason stepped in.

"Sixth floor," he commanded.

The elevator boy was a Greek, who spoke the argot of the streets fairly well.

"Who you wan'a see?" he questioned.

Mason looked at him with an expression of curiosity. Then he threw open his coat, disclosing his badge.

"Shoot her up, boy," he ordered. "Franklin's on the sixth, ain't he?"

He had glanced at the cards above the letter boxes in the vestibule as he passed in and had picked a name from them.

"Seventh," returned the boy, as he closed the door and threw over the starting lever. With him, as with the negro, the badge and the gesture connoted the police. "You gona pinch him?" he asked, curiously.

Mason did not answer. He did not even look at the boy. He merely waited until the elevator stopped at the seventh floor and then stepped out.

"Which way?" he asked.

The boy told him and started down, completely satisfied that he was no sneak-thief or other unwarranted intruder.

Mason made no attempt to find Franklin, with whom indeed he had no business. He had kept his bearings carefully as he entered the building and without delay he made his way along the proper corridor to a window that looked out on the Chimney-stack Building.

Very easily he picked out the Werder apartment by the broken window pane. It was, however, not opposite him, but a good way to the right and a little below. Undiscouraged, he made his way to the staircase, descended to the sixth floor, moved along another corridor and looked out again.

This time he nodded to himself cheerfully. Werder's window was almost exactly opposite—so nearly opposite, in fact, that the two holes in the glass were almost exactly in line with his eyes. Against the dark background of the room they stood out clearly

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even at that distance. Beyond a doubt the bullet that had made them—for, despite the coroner's assertion that Werder had not been shot, Mason was sure that a bullet had made them—the bullet must have been fired from the very next apartment.

It took the reporter only a moment to note the number of this apartment; and it took him only two or three more to descend to the entrance floor and inspect the mail boxes and discover the name of the tenant.

It was Russell Conway.

The reporter was not surprised. He nodded as if he had suspected it long before—as indeed he had. Out to the street he started, then hesitated and came back.

"Say, D'mitri," he said to the elevator boy, "or whatever your name is! What time'd that guy come to see Mr. Conway this mornin'."

The boy shook his head.

"Ain't nobody come to see him," he answered.

"Nonsense! Think again!"

The boy thought—or tried to do so. But he was unable to conjure a visitor from the depths of his memory.

"There ain't been nobody to see Mr. Conway today!" he insisted.

Mason gave up at last. But he was very sure that there had been a visitor.

Swiftly assembling in his mind the multifarious bits of information that he had acquired the reporter sped back to the *Gazette* office. The city editor was not in at the moment and, without reporting, he sat down at his typewriter and looked over a miscellaneous collection of clippings from the afternoon papers and the sheets of "flimsy" from the City Press Association bearing on the Werder case that he found "spiked" there.

By the time he had finished with these, Perkins, the regular police reporter, whom he had left at Werder's rooms, came in on his way back to police headquarters and narrated what had happened after Mason had left.

Mason listened with many nods of approval.

"Did you get an interview with Conway?" he asked, after Perkins had finished.

The police reporter shook his head.

"Tried to," he said. "But he wouldn't talk. I guess he'd already told all he knew, anyhow!"

"Not much he hadn't!" Mason's dissent was instantaneous. "The bullet that broke those windows came from his rooms."

"But Werder wasn't shot!"

"No! He wasn't shot. But that doesn't mean that he wasn't shot at! But it's all right. I'm just as glad Conway refused to talk. Let me know if anything new comes up."

When Perkins had gone Mason turned to his typewriter and began to rattle out his story. First he wrote a general introduction in regular newspaper style. Then he began a new tale of the sort for which he had recently become famous—a tale which attempted to translate into fiction a true story that was still in the making. Insofar as he knew the facts he gave them, but where the facts were lacking he did not hesitate to improvise others in accordance with what he believed to be the truth. Always he strove to give the impression that he knew all about his subject and was telling less rather than more than he could.

He had just finished the opening paragraph when Hibbs, the city editor, coming behind him, read it over his shoulder and offered mild protest—a protest that Mason, as has been stated, speedily overcame.

Left alone, at last, he wrote the story that was to be blazoned to the world on the coming morning.

WHO WAS THE ASSASSIN?

ONE FAILS BUT ANOTHER SUCCEEDS

Mysterious Murder of Otto Werder in a Locked Room in the Chimneystack Building

Attempt to Indicate Suicide Balked by the *Gazette's* Special Sherlock Holmes

Otto Werder, a somewhat mysterious tenant in the Chimneystack Building, came to a sudden death yesterday alone, in his locked apartment, within hearing of at least three people. When the door was broken in he was found lying in front of a window, whose glass had been shattered, apparently by a bullet. Examination seemed to show, however, that the body bore no wounds and that death must have come in some other way, which so far remains undiscovered. An autopsy is now being held by the coroner. Meanwhile the would-be assassin—

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for in all probability there was a would-be assassin—is escaping.

In this emergency the *Gazette* has consulted its private sleuth, "Old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes," who, as so often before—when the police were running around in circles—promptly solved at least one phase of the mystery. If the police continue to blunder, in their customary fashion, he will solve other phases and, if necessary, will capture the criminal.

The *Gazette* presents this solution below, offering it freely to all and particularly to the police—who so greatly need it.

COLLIER-VIDOCQ-HOLMES COMES AGAIN TO THE RESCUE OF THE BEWILDERED POLICE

Bareheaded, white-faced, with eyes so black with anger that they looked like holes burned in a blanket, Russell Conway ran across the street and sprang up the entrance steps of the Chimneystack Building.

"Here!" he panted, as he ran. "Here! Under my very eyes for weeks—weeks! And I never guessed. I—never guessed."

Two minutes before Conway had been sitting in his apartment in the Electrolier Building, directly opposite the one in the Chimneystack Building that was tenanted by Otto Werder. Whether Conway observed it or not, the blinds of Werder's windows were still down to the very bottom, and this, despite the fact that it was after twelve o'clock.

Then a letter arrived for Conway. How did it come? No one knows; on this point Mr. Conway refuses to be interviewed.

What did it say? Again no one knows; on this point also Conway refuses to be interviewed. But its effect was to drive him, muttering desperately to himself, out of his rooms and across the street to the Chimneystack Building.

Meanwhile his own apartment was left untenanted, at the mercy of any one who might be able to pick the none-too-complicated lock—at the mercy, perhaps, of the visitor who had brought the letter; or perhaps, of some one who knew that it was to be brought.

In at the door of the Chimneystack Building Conway sprang, and to the elevator he rushed. The door of the cage was open and into it he hurled himself.

"Werder's apartment. Sixth floor! Quick!" he ordered, sobbingly.

"Yessir! Yessir! Right away, sir."

Bob, the negro elevator boy shot the iron grill across the opening and flung over the starting lever. Bob was from the South and he knew when it was safe to dawdle with "white folks" and when it was not. This time fell distinctly in the "not" class. He had known Conway for months, but he had never before seen him in such a state as this.

He put on full power and shot the car upward, disregarding an imperious ring from the fourth floor. Moreover, when, on the sixth floor, Conway, scarcely pausing for him to open the door, shot out and raced to Apartment sixty-two, he did not go back to answer the insistent ringing. Instead, with goggle eyes and dropping jaw, he leaned from the cage and stared as Conway, finding the door fast, flung his weight furiously against it.

The door did not yield, of course. It was built to resist far heavier shocks than that of Conway's none-too-massive bulk; and at last its assailant desisted and, finger on the push bell, drummed the devil's tattoo with the fist of his other hand on the stout panels.

No shooting of bolt or click of lock rewarded his efforts. The door remained immovable.

But the clamor had its effect, nevertheless. Roused by it Werder undoubtedly sprang from his bed and rushed to the window and let up the blind. Instantly, from the apartment across the way—Conway's apartment—came a low clang—the clang that betokens the work of that "assassin's friend," the "silencer."

Simultaneously the glass in Werder's window shivered into fragments; and simultaneously too, Conway, in the hall without, heard a shriek—a shriek filled with such intense horror that the teeth of the frightened negro in the cage began to rattle like castanets. Bob was not a coward where any enemy of his own class was concerned, but this shriek was unlike any he had ever heard in all his life before. High it rose, in shrill crescendo, then ended sharply as if bitten off. Last came a heavy fall that sent a quiver through even the stout cement and iron on which the oaken flooring was laid.

The shriek and the crash brought Conway to his senses. Dazedly he reeled back from the door.

"What the devil," he began; then broke off and stared stupidly at the letter in his hand. "Good Lord," he muttered. "I've

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got to control myself better. This isn't any way to behave!"

Up from the top of the stairway, just beyond the elevator, there bounded a fat and pudgy man—Armour, manager of the apartment—whose black eyes were filled with haunting terror above his swarthy cheeks.

"Why ain't you stop for me?" he roared, at the elevator boy. "You are discharge!"

Then he seemed to recognize Conway and he ran forward.

"What d'ye mean beatin' on the door thataway?" he demanded, in the vernacular of the city but in a voice that plainly showed the influence of some alien tongue, just as his face showed the presence of some alien strain of blood.

Conway started.

"I don't know," he choked. "Somebody inside shrieked and fell."

The manager's flaming cheeks abruptly paled.

"Werder?" he gasped.

"How the devil do I know?" Conway snapped back at him. "Likelier he's up to some devil's work. Have you a key to this door?"

The manager's face was ghastly.

"Yes! Yes! I got a key," he stammered, thrusting his shaking fingers into his pockets. "Oh! My God! What have happen? Oh! Such a misfortune for my house. I call you to witness, Mr. Conway. It ain't my fault. It ain't the fault of the house! I don't was here! That fool boy ain't stop for me and——"

"The key! The key!"

The man threw up his hands. Clearly he was no hand for such an emergency.

"I ain't got it," he wheezed. "I have left it in the office. I go for it quick! Mr. Conway! Wait! Wait! Don't go in till I come back!"

Conway's nerves snapped.

"How can I get in without the key, you —— fool," he roared. "Go for it. Quick!"

The manager did not move. Abruptly transfixed, he stood listening.

"Hear! Hear!" he moaned.

Low but clear the sound of a long-drawn musical whistle came through the heavy door. There was beseechment in the tone, as of some one calling, calling, calling. Musically, though tunelessly, it rose and fell, rose and fell, while the two men listened, holding their rasped nerves in check.

But the elevator boy made no attempt to hold his terror back. He knew a death call when he heard it. Instinctively he shot downward, slamming the elevator door behind him.

The crash of the iron gate broke the spell. Conway laughed gratingly.

"That whistle's not in the room. It's outside, in the street," he raged.

Armour's face cleared with enormous relief.

"Outside?" he gasped. "Outside! I go for the key." Then he saw that Bob and the elevator had vanished and hesitated. "Perhaps we get in this way," he stuttered; and rushed to the door of the adjoining apartment. "Perhaps this is open—yes!"

The knob turned in his hand and the door swung open and he rushed in.

Conway followed. Conway was measurably familiar with the building. He knew that Werder's apartments, in which the tragedy—if tragedy it was—had taken place was at the corner of the building and had windows opening on the north and the west. The adjoining apartment, into which Armour and Conway had penetrated, looked out only to the north. A third apartment, like Werder's except that it opened on the north and the east—instead of on the west—made up the rest of the wing. All three were bachelor flats of two rooms and an intervening bath; each was entirely independent in its arrangement but was capable of being dismembered and differently recombined by means of communicating doors. The middle—north-facing—apartment, into which the manager had just rushed, was untenanted.

As Conway reached the hall door Armour reached the inner communicating door to the Werder apartment and began to struggle with the lock. An instant later, apparently finding it fast, he threw his weight against the panels. The door, obviously weaker than that opening on the hall, creaked and groaned but did not give way, and the manager drew back, panting.

The next instant Conway came up with a rush and hurled himself bodily at the door. Beneath his impact it actually split in twain, half of it flying back and half, torn loose, falling athwart the sill. Conway, unable to check himself, lurched through the opening, stumbled, and fell.

As he scrambled to his feet he heard the manager cry out, short and shrill—the cry

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of one who sees his worst fears realized. Then Conway, too, looked.

On the floor, on his back, directly in front of a window and close to a dresser, beside which a low gaslight still burned, lay the contorted form of a huge man, barefoot, clad only in pajamas, apparently just as he had sprung from the disordered bed at the back of the room. Unmistakably he was dead.

Unheeding the manager, who stood halting on the threshold, shivering like one with the ague, Conway dropped to his knees and glared into the face of the man at whose door he had clamored so furiously ten minutes before.

Then, abruptly he sprang to his feet and whirled upon the manager.

"Telephone for the police, at once," he ordered.

Swaying drunkenly the manager stumbled forward.

"He—he is dead?" he questioned. "Maybe if I get doctor——"

"Get a doctor if you like; but it's no use. He's dead, probably murdered. The police——"

"Murdered!" The manager shivered and his face grew even ghastlier. "Murdered! No! No! He ain't murdered! He—he is dead of the heart trouble. Yes! Yes! That is it. He is dead of the heart trouble. He suffer from it much. Often he have told me of it. Only yesterday he have had an attack. Yes! Yes! It is the heart trouble. We need a doctor—yes; but no police, no no. The reputation of my house will——"

"—— the reputation of your house. The man's been shot. Look at that window."

The manager looked.

The blinds on two of the tall windows were still drawn down to the very wood of the sills. But that on the third, before which lay the body, was up, clear to the top. Its cord, in fact, was wrapped about it three or four times, as if the blind, suddenly released, had been jerked violently up by the strength of its spring. The upper sash of the window was half down and through the overlapping parts of the two sashes was a hole, clearly drilled by a bullet, from which dozens of cracks, large and small, radiated, star-like.

"Somebody must have shot him through the window as he raised the blind," said Conway. "Look at the glass splinters on the floor. He let go the cord, and the blind rushed up. Oh! It's a murder, all right—unless it's an accident. The hound deserved to be shot, and I'll spend every cent I've got to defend the man who shot him, but the matter's got to be cleared up, all the same. Call the police—never mind! Here's a telephone. I'll call them."

The manager did not seem to hear. From the moment his eyes had followed Conway's to the perforated glass his attention had been centered on it and his mind oblivious to all else.

"Shot?" he muttered. "Shot! Shot!"

Then, abruptly, he began to cackle with strident laughter.

Telephone in hand Conway paused.

"Shut up!" he ordered, sharply. "Pull yourself together, man. We'll have a mob of rubbering fools on our hands in a minute. Go downstairs and get the key to the other door and tell that elevator boy not to let any one up except the police. Hello! Central! Give me Spring 3100! Quick!"

The sharpness in Conway's tones had its effect. The manager started, looked around, then relaxed. Then, as Conway waited for the telephone connection:

"Yes! Yes! I do as you say," he promised, humbly. "I was only thinking on account I don't want to spoil the reputation of my house. I—I——"

He started for Werder's other room on the way to the door to the hall.

But Conway's voice halted him.

"The other door," he ordered. "The other door. Don't open that one. Let the police see it just as it is."

Then, as Armour ran out he turned back to the telephone.

"Yes! Hello! Police headquarters? This is Russ Conway speaking. There's been an accident or a murder in Apartment 62, Chimneystack Building—oh! All right. Send some one at once. All right."

Conway hung up the receiver and turned and stared about the bedroom, as if seeking some clue to the mystery of Werder's death. Ponderingly he stood till a rush of feet sounded outside and Armour, the manager, reappeared at the side door, bringing the key for which he had gone, but too much engrossed in holding back a throng of sensation seekers to think of using it.

Conway hurried to the door, but before he could reach it a sudden relaxation in the pressure and a stir and turning in the crowd

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heralded the advent of two patrolmen and a detective in plain clothes.

Very quickly the situation cleared. At a sign from the plain-clothes man the two patrolmen hustled the onlookers out of the central flat into the corridor, and one of them stood guard outside the closed door, while the other took station at the broken communicating door.

Meanwhile the plain-clothes man—who was none other than the peerless Bob Heber, New York's greatest thief-taker since the year one—was bending over the body and studying it, taking care, however, to disturb nothing about it. Then he stood up and began to question the manager and Mr. Conway with the wonderful acuteness and intelligence that is so characteristic of our city police.

The questioning developed the fact that Werder was a foreigner, perhaps a Swede, of unknown antecedents who had rented the apartment several months before. The manager thought that he had been ill lately —a fact that soon became of particular moment.

Detective Heber then turned his attention to Mr. Conway, who explained that he was the real-estate agent for the building. He had been looking up some Western property for the dead man, and he had called that morning in connection with it. He did not explain the cause of his agitation in the elevator and at the locked door. No doubt he forgot it.

These important facts having been elucidated Detective Heber and Messrs. Conway and Armour indulged in a three-cornered discussion of possibilities, in regard to the bullet-holes in the window panes—a learned discussion that would doubtless have been of tremendous practical value if the coroner had not appeared in the midst of it and examined the body and discovered that it showed no bullet-holes.

Werder had not been shot!

It is sad that a veil can not be drawn over the scene that followed the coroner's announcement.

Flushed with anger to his very ear tips Heber swung furiously on Conway.

"What the ——" he began.

But Conway was equally red-faced.

"I didn't look for a wound," he babbled. "I thought I oughtn't to touch the body till the coroner came. The man was dead and——"

"And the bullet-holes were in the window," finished the coroner. "Quite right, Mr. Conway. It was an entirely natural conclusion."

He turned to Armour.

"Were any of your people in here yesterday," he questioned, "anybody who would have seen those holes if they had been made at that time?"

Armour did not answer the question. He was staring at the body with wide-stretched eyes.

"Not shot," he muttered. "Not shot! My God! He must be shot—or, no, no, he —he die of the pain in the heart. That is what I said at the first. I meet him in the hall yesterday and he was sick. He have his hand to his heart and he gasp, gasp, gasp. He say it hurt—and then he go up in the elevator."

The doctor looked at the body.

"Maybe!" he said. "An autopsy will show. But what I asked you was whether any of your men would be likely to know when these bullet-holes were made?"

Armour looked bewildered. Then he shook his head violently.

"No! No!" he said. "The tenants take care of their own apartments."

"Are you sure Mr.—er—Werder didn't pay anybody, the elevator boy, for instance, to sweep and straighten up for him?"

Armour hesitated.

"I go ask," he said, and started for the door.

But the coroner stopped him with a question, and before he finished answering Heber had passed the word and Bob was into the room.

"Yas, sir," he answered, staring goggle-eyed at the body on the floor. Yas, sir. I done clean up ev'y day for Mr. Werder. I clean up yestiddy, 'bout lunch-time."

"Why at lunch-time?"

"'Cause Mr. Werder warn't home befo', an' 'cause he wouldn't never let me in 'less he's here. Reckon he thought I'd steal sumpin'! He needn't er troubled hisself. He ain't had nothin' worth stealin'."

"Did you ever see anybody watching this room from the building across the street?"

Bob shook his head.

"No, suh!" he answered wonderingly.

"Turn around! See if anybody is watching now!"

The boy spun around. But he did not

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look at the building opposite. Instead, his eyes focused on the splintered glass.

"Who done that?" he demanded, excitedly, pointing.

"Didn't you notice it when you were in here yesterday?"

"No, suh. 'Cause why? 'Twarn't there to notice. I done wash that window and all the windows in this yere room yestiddy, and 'twarn't none of 'em broke then."

"That's all!" The coroner seemed to dismiss the matter from his mind. "After all, Heber," he said, "as the man was not shot the question of the bullet-holes is one of purely academic import. Have the body sent to the morgue to await an autopsy."

Then he glanced toward the reporters.

"Gentlemen," he said. "The chances are that this man died from natural causes. His body shows no signs of violence; and it is impossible to tell the cause of death in advance of an autopsy. Mr. Heber will probably want to examine the rooms thoroughly. After he has finished he may be willing to permit you to do the same if you wish. Meanwhile—" he paused significantly.

"Meanwhile—good morning, gentlemen; don't let me detain you," chuckled one of the reporters.

The doctor did not answer. He merely grinned and passed through the throng into the other room and started for the corridor door. The others, except one policeman left on guard, followed, leaving the dead to the dead.

The reporters clustered about Conway—Armour had fled to shelter some time before—and plied him with questions, to all of which he replied by a shake of the head.

"You heard all I said, gentlemen," he insisted. "Well! It's all I know. Good morning."

After this the throng broke up swiftly. The newspaper-men had either to write their stories for the afternoon papers or had to get additional stories for the morning papers. They had no time to fool away on the Werder case.

Werder had not been shot; that was evident. His body bore no apparent wound. According to the manager of the building Werder had complained of heart trouble. Therefore—Werder had died from shock of his sudden awaking; and there was no further mystery to explore.

Later, of course, if the coroner found anything wrong—but he would not find anything wrong. The story had fizzled.

So the reporters scattered.

Not one of them seemed to think it worth while to try to find the would-be assassin whose shot had drilled those twin holes through the window, in an endeavor, perhaps, to anticipate the actual assassin. Not one of them noticed that the supposed splinters of glass strewn on the floor before the window had been growing steadily fewer and fewer until more than half of them had wholly disappeared; and of course—failing to notice this—not one of them guessed the one and only explanation: that the would-be assassin had fired, not a bullet of lead but a bullet of ice (either natural or artificial), some of whose fragments had later melted on the rug in the Werder rooms.

Not one of them, consequently, drew the inescapable corollary: that the shot had been fired a very few moments before. And not one of them discovered that it could have been fired only from the apartment of Russell Conway, in the Electrolier Building, across the street, probably at the very moment when Russell Conway was clamoring at the door of the Werder apartment for admittance!

CHAPTER III

FEW REPORTERS can turn out more than two ordinary newspaper columns in less than three hours and Mason wrote more than three columns before he ended. Moreover, the day had been exhausting. When at last he rose from his typewriter he was both flushed and shivering, racked with something that seemed like fever but yet was not fever and cold with an ague that was not an ague.

This condition was not new to Mason. For six months he had experienced just such "spells"; and he doubted whether he would ever again be free from them. They were, he knew, a consequence of the year he had spent in Europe, behind the lines of the Germanic powers at the breaking out of the great war.

When the explosion came he was in Vienna, in the course of a three-months' globe-trotting trip; and like all other newspaper-men, he welcomed the clash of arms and went crazy with delight when he got permission to follow the armies in the field. His association with the *Gazette* was an old

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one and he did not need to consult it at all; in fact he received half a dozen imploring messages from it before he succeeded in getting a single one back to America.

Heart and soul he had thrown himself into the work. At the beginning he had no very strong predilection for either side; but very soon he found himself unconsciously swayed toward the powers with which he camped. At that time he, like most Americans, looked on the war merely as a personal quarrel between emperors and not as the life and death struggle for world liberty that it later turned out to be. The triumphant rush of the conquering Teutons roused his enthusiasm.

Later came disillusion, slow but sure, as he learned little by little the real meaning of the devil's work for which those magnificent armies had been raised and to which they had been dedicated. At last, when protesting perhaps too strenuously and certainly too imprudently against a particularly fiendish example of *Kultur*, he was shot down and left for dead.

Saved at the last gasp by the barest of chances and restored after many months to so-called health he returned to the United States to recuperate. It was weeks before he could resume newspaper work; and even after he did resume it, any over-exertion was sure to bring on a relapse.

Most other men who were half as exhausted as he was after he had finished his first story on the Werder case would have gone to bed and sent for a doctor. Mason, however, thought not at all of either bed or doctor—and would not think of them till he had solved some of the mysteries that still hung about Werder's death. His nose was to the trail and nothing short of sheer physical inability would make him quit it. Moreover he had to prepare for the next day's story by taking Madame Ayesha to supper.

The average reporter's work is never finished. Almost invariably he carries home with him at night a hang-over from the assignments he had covered during the day. He can never get ahead of his work. His task is to portray history in the making; and history-making never stops. Let the world sleep or wake as it may, life goes on, without haste but without rest; and where life is, there also must be its chronicler.

To a newspaper-man, each day brings fresh problems, but they are problems that after all are mere continuances or repetitions of the problems of the day before. They must be caught as they come, for they come fast. He who would grasp them must grasp quickly. Very soon the game "gets him" or repudiates him altogether. The newspaper is a jealous mistress.

This of the everyday reporter. The big men, those who get the important assignments that run on for days and even for weeks, literally never rest. Always they are obsessed with the belief that the world is waiting breathlessly for them to tell it about itself; and little short of death will prevent them from trying to meet expectations.

Mason's particular work was even more pressing. He had, not merely to chronicle the daily developments, as did others of his craft, but he had also to devise each day a story that would not only satisfy his readers—who, after all, wanted facts as well as suspense—but that would also fit in broadly with the solution of the mystery when time should have disclosed it.

Mason was not a novelist who could keep the earlier chapters of his story to himself till he reached the solution and then alter them to agree with it. With him the moving finger literally wrote and passed on; and the written words remained, not to be recalled. Unless he constructed his stories with almost prophetic power, people would be sure sooner or later to write sarcastic letters to the *Gazette*, casting scorn upon his powers of prognostication.

Moreover, people would stop reading his "stuff"; the next time he essayed the role of detective they would sniff and ignore it—and the *Gazette* would fire him.

To prevent this as long as possible he had devised a method that was simple in principle though difficult in practise. It was based on the rule of the Delphic Oracle of old to make no statement that could not later be given at least two different meanings. Long practise had made him expert at this, and he had since ceased to worry about the distant future. Sooner or later it would bring him humiliation—this much he knew and discounted and forgot. But he had never ceased to worry about the story that he would have to write the next night.

IN THIS particular case he did not know, of course, what the coming day would bring. Very likely something would develop—some big "end" to the story that would make useless anything

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he might do that night. On the other hand, he might work all the following day and get nothing. So, tired as he was, he knew that he must keep his engagement to take Madame Ayesha to supper and see if he could get from her a framework on which he could, if necessary, build a story on the morrow.

He had no compunctions whatever about using her. He knew well that the tribe to which she belonged would stand for anything that would get them talked about. Moreover, he sympathized with their desire for advertisement, rightly ascribing it to business far more than to vanity. Notoriety means money for theater people just as it does for a soap or a perfume or a breakfast food; and theater people need the money just as much as do the manufacturers of the soap and the perfume or the breakfast food.

The fact that they advertise themselves, and that the manufacturer advertises his wares was, in Mason's estimation, of absolutely no importance. Each advertised what he had to sell, and each increased his income in proportion to the degree in which he became known. Mason was always glad to give an "artist" a leg up.

Moreover, he was by no means certain that Ayesha might not be in some way mixed up in the Werder mystery. She lived in the building; she was a good deal agitated about Werder's death; she was—if Mason could judge—just the type of woman that would go crazy with jealousy, and Werder was just the sort of man that would give her cause to go crazy. Some affair between the two ending with Werder's murder was, from a newspaper point of view, not at all improbable. Anyhow, the possibility might very well be made to serve as material for a good story. Mason decided to look into its possibilities.

At the theater he looked at his watch and, finding that he was early, went into the lobby, intending to learn the character of Ayesha's act before going to the stage door for her. Afar off, on the other side of the lobby, he caught sight of her name in big black letters across the top of a poster, the rest of which was hidden from his sight by the body of a bulky man who seemed to be studying it intently. Subconsciously Mason judged that this man was merely some casual spectator and strolled toward him in leisurely fashion.

Then, abruptly, he checked his stride, sheered off to the right, and, without halting, described a wide curve that took him back to the entrance and out of the lobby into the street.

The man was Detective Heber.

What the devil was he doing there? Mason asked himself. Why was he studying Madame Ayesha's poster? Did he really suspect the woman of Werder's murder?

Mason's blood quickened at the thought. If the police were really after Madame Ayesha he meant to beat them to it or know the reason why.

Swiftly he hurried to the stage door and sent in his card with a scribbled line:

"Come out as quick as you can. Big news."

Either the call was efficacious or Madame Ayesha was ready and waiting, for she came out almost instantly, anxiety in her bearing.

"Hello!" she called, the moment she saw him. "What's broke loose?"

But Mason shook his head.

"Can't tell you here," he said. "Some one I don't want to see you is coming! We've got to get away. Hurry!"

Hesitantly for a moment the woman looked at him. Then she nodded.

"All right," she said.

Half an hour later the two were seated at a table in one of Broadway's gilded lobster palaces.

When the waiter had gone with the order Madame Ayesha leaned forward.

"Well?" she said. "Ain't it about time you were spilling the beans? Or have I got to wait till the toothpicks?"

Her tones were mocking, but they were also uneasy.

Mason hesitated.

"I'd rather not tell you just now," he said, at last. "I want to talk of some other things first. I'll tell you before we leave. May I wait?"

For answer, Madame Ayesha shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Sure," she said. "Suit yourself. Let your news wait, if you like, and go ahead and tell me about the Werder case."

Mason told her—and watched her and listened to her comment besides. He seemed to be speaking with utter frankness, and he was indeed very nearly doing so. Frankness to him seemed most likely to

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produce the reaction he wanted—the reaction that would enable him to connect the woman with the Werder case.

But he was long in finding it. Vainly he dangled bait after bait without getting even a nibble. Madame Ayesha listened and commented on all with an apt vivacity and an apparent light-heartedness that even Mason could scarcely have believed to be assumed if he had not seen the serpent of fear that lay coiled behind her eyes. But she told nothing of significance, and at last he began to wonder whether she really had anything to tell.

Another thing troubled him. He was beginning to remember her vaguely; and he was quite sure that his memory did not date back to any casual every-day meeting. There had been something vital about it, he was sure, something associated with an epoch in his life.

But he could not place it. Every possible suggestion that crept into his mind he at once dismissed. All of them seemed too preposterous. One thing, however, was borne in upon him. Recollection of his earlier meeting with her and discovery of her connection with Werder would come together. Somehow they were united. He was sure of it.

But how? He could not guess. Finally he half-closed his eyes and deliberately called back, one by one, the events in Werder's room just as he had lived through them; and into each he tried to project Madame Ayesha's personality. Swiftly, like the scenes in a cinematograph, the shuttling pictures flitted before his mind's eye.

But still he could not remember.

Then abruptly Madame Ayesha leaned forward.

"Say! For the love of Mike," she cried. "What's the matter?"

"The matter?" The reporter stared amazedly. "Nothing," he answered. "Why?"

Madame Ayesha laughed.

"Don't you know?" she asked. "Then I'm dead sure something's the matter. See what you've done. Look."

Mason's eyes followed her to where his own hand rested on the white table-cloth. In it were the remains of a rather fragile salt shaker that had been crumpled out of shape by the fervor of his grip.

Curiously he stared at his fingers, white, almost numb from the pressure. Then, abruptly, he recalled the time, not so long before, when he had gripped a fragment of wood with equal power.

LIKE a flash he leaned forward. "Tell me," he flamed. "When did you bore that hole in the bottom of Werder's side door?"

The blood fled from the woman's cheeks, leaving them whiter than any chalk.

"You know?" she gasped.

"Yes! I know!" Mason extended a shaking finger across the cloth. "You killed Werder?" he rasped.

"Husssh!" The color flooded back into the woman's face. "For God's sake, hush." Affrightedly she glanced about her at the glittering tables and the laughing diners. "Somebody'll hear you."

"Well! Why shouldn't they hear me?" Mason pressed his advantage.

"Because—because—don't you know who Werder was? But, no? I reckon you don't. You were dead before he came into the story."

"Dead?" The reporter's face paled. Abruptly the mists that had blinded him rolled away. "You mean?" he gasped. "You—you were there?"

"Yes. I was there. You didn't notice me, of course. You weren't botherin' about me. Oh! I ain't blamin' you. I was only one of four and you didn't see me more'n a minute. And you had Miss Edith to think about. But I saw you; and—well, you looked like a life-preserver to me. I couldn't help noticin' and rememberin' you. And I never forgot you, even when I died too. Oh! Yes! I did die. I had to die.

"No woman ever went through what I went through and lived to tell it. I did die! Afterward—long afterward—I came back to life. But I came back another woman. Oh! I can counterfeit and pretend. I've got to do both to earn my living. But I'm not the woman who died. I'm a different woman altogether. The first woman was good and kind, made so by 'her.' "

"Her!" The word was a cry.

"Yes! Her! She's dead too. Didn't you know it?"

Mason bowed his head.

"Yes, I knew it," he said. "But I never knew exactly how she died."

"You never will. That beast Werder could have told you—but he'll never tell anybody now. I can guess something; but

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I won't do it. I won't think of it—I don't want to go back to the madhouse. I was in it once; and when I got out I was an avenger and nothing else."

Mason drew a long breath.

"So it was you who did bore that hole?" he began.

"Yes! It was I—I tortured Werder as he tortured me. But I didn't mean to kill him. And I didn't kill him—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless 'it' did it. And 'it' could not have done it. I took every precaution. And yet somebody killed him, and 'it' never came back an' never was found." With a gasp the woman broke off. Then—"That ain't your news, is it?" she demanded. "'It' ain't been found, is it?"

"Not by me." Mason did not understand wholly, but he was guessing fast.

"And—and—the coroner said there were no wounds on the body of—that beast."

"He said so. But——"

"But what?"

"But when I came here tonight I saw Heber—the detective on the case, you know—I saw Heber looking at your posters in the lobby of the theater."

Shortly and sharply the woman laughed.

"Then 'it' has been found," she breathed.

"Perhaps! I don't know. And—don't be frightened now. I'm going to help you, for the sake of—you know who. What I'm going to say will be a shock, but—remember that we're going to beat Heber and all his tribe. Smile at me! Laugh! Don't let him suspect!"

"Him?"

The exclamation was a gasp. But Ayesha's hand was steady as she raised her glass; and her lips curved in the set smile that becomes nature to the children of the stage.

"Good." Mason's commendation was prompt. "Apply to me for a recommendation when you want a part to play tragedy. Heber is standing behind you watching us both. Your health, Madame."

The two clinked glasses. Ayesha drank deeply; and the color flooded back into her cheeks. Then she threw back her shoulders.

"After all," she said, with eyes and cheeks that laughed, but with a voice that rang like metal upon metal. "After all, if 'it' did kill him I am glad. And I am willing to pay if I must. But I did not mean to kill him. Bah! What is death? Nothing! You cold-blooded Americans think you have taken vengeance when you kill. But we—I and my people—we know it is better to let a man live and—suffer. And I made Werder suffer. God! Yes! I made him suffer.

"Day after day I watched him, and day after day I saw the lines in his face cut deeper and deeper. Oh! Yes! I saw them, and I'm glad I put them there. I'm so glad that I am willing to pay the penalty—to pay it to the last ounce. Say! We can't talk here. Come to my rooms—if that detective don't stop me. Come on. I'll tell you the whole story there—all that you don't know already. Come."

CHAPTER IV

MASON waked early the next morning. The Werder mystery haunted his dreams and drove him to wake-a-day life the moment sleep had knit up his ravelled body and freed him from the physical exhaustion that had claimed him the night before.

He had left Madame Ayesha very late—too late by far for him to hope to get her story into the morning *Gazette*. He had not even attempted to write the story, knowing that anything he might write would almost certainly be modified by the events of the coming day. Straight to his rooms he had gone and had dropped, fully dressed, across his bed.

Nevertheless, he waked early. Eight o'clock saw him at breakfast and nine o'clock saw him, with a copy of the *Gazette* in his hand, joining half a dozen other newspaper-men who were waiting at the foot of the elevator in the Electrolier Building, obviously to see and question Russell Conway about the *Gazette* story.

Some one had put the fear of discharge into the elevator boy and he was deaf to all inquiries and protests.

"You gotta wait," was all he would say. "Mr. Conway'll send word."

Plainly Conway had read the *Gazette* story and was trying to decide what to say before he admitted questioners.

One of the reporters—the only one in the lot that Mason knew—nodded to him as he came in, then drew him aside to chat.

"Say, Billy," he said. "You raised the devil with that story of yours."

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"You mean the Cap Collier-Vidocq-Sherlock story in the *Gazette?*" countered Mason.

"I mean your story in the *Gazette,*" returned the other, firmly. "But have it as you like. It's raised Cain, anyhow. I saw it early and hustled around here and caught Conway just coming from breakfast and showed it to him. He nearly had a fit. But he wouldn't talk. He fled to the elevator without saying a word except 'After while!' 'After while!' Later he sent down word that he'd see me at 9:30. So I phoned the office and got orders to wait. Say, Billy, how in thunder did you get that story—some parts of it, I mean? You know which ones. They don't read like fake."

"They weren't fake. I was first on the ground, you know, and I got a peep behind the scenes. Of course a lot of the yarn was guesswork, but it's all substantially true—so far as it goes. I'll give you my word on that."

"You think Conway knows who shot at Werder from his window?"

Mason laughed.

"That's the question," he returned. "My guess is that he doesn't—or didn't until after the shot was fired. Maybe he suspects now, but I'm not so sure."

"But what difference does it really make, anyhow. Werder wasn't shot. He wasn't even wounded."

"So the coroner says."

"Eh! You think——"

"I haven't made up my mind what to think. Of course Werder wasn't killed with an ice bullet. I never said he was. But he was shot at with something, which may have been ice. Anyhow, I'm dead sure that more than one person wanted to kill him. I've got a story for tomorrow about one of them that all the wise boys will say is a fake. But it isn't a fake, though it's told like one."

"Humph! Then you think the killing was a sort of a Black Hand affair?"

Mason shook his head slowly.

"No-o-o, I don't think that," he said. "I've got a line on a third person who does look sort of Black Handy, but there isn't any Black Hand business about my story for tomorrow. And as for this shooting-from-the-window yarn—well! We can't go much further with that till the coroner tells us what did kill Werder. Then——"

"Here's the elevator!" broke in the other. "Come along! Conway's evidently ready."

The elevator had, in fact, come down. The newspaper men crowded into it. Scarcely could Mason and Foster find a place.

In his room on the sixth floor Russell Conway was awaiting them. Very plainly he had decided on his course.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, heartily, as the reporters filed in. "Come in! Glad to see you. I'm sorry I had to keep you waiting, but this—er—dime-novel yarn required reflection."

"Is it really a dime-novel yarn?" Foster, the reporter who had been chatting with Mason, asked the question.

Conway laughed with a spontaneity which if not genuine was certainly well-imitated.

"Well, yes," he answered. "I should say that it was. It certainly isn't newspaper work, and it isn't history, or essay, or literature, and there doesn't seem to be anything left but sheer dime-novelism. But, sit down, gentlemen."

The reporters sat down and waited for Conway to go on or for Foster, their self-constituted spokeman, to ask another question. One of the first things a reporter learns is not to "kill" an interview by rushing the subject.

Conway did not keep them waiting.

"When I call it a dime novel," he went on, "I'm speaking of course of the way it's written. As a dime novel it is a very creditable piece of work. And it's got a whole lot of truth in it. Truth and fake are so intimately blended that it's hard to say which is which. At first I was startled, as Mr. Foster will tell you." He nodded at the newspaper-man. "He showed me the story an hour or so ago, and I was more than startled. First I wanted to kill the man who wrote it. Then I wanted to sue the *Gazette.* Then I calmed down and laughed at the whole thing. Now what do you gentlemen want to know specifically?"

Foster took it upon himself to answer.

"The most important things," he said, "seem to be about yourself and this apartment. The *Gazette* says that you were frightfully agitated when you ran over to the Chimneystack Building. How about it?"

"You bet I was agitated! You'd have been, too, in my place. I'd been dickering for a ranch out in Dakota for Werder. I didn't seem able to get the terms fixed

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satisfactorily and Werder was getting restive. Day before yesterday he came here late, mad as hops, and wanted to call the deal off—said he was going away. Of course I protested and told him I expected an answer about the ranch any minute. Eventually I talked him 'round. He agreed to wait one more day. I took him out to dinner and to a show and got him better satisfied.

"But I was worried, and I stuck close here yesterday, waiting for that letter. It came about noon and said that the owners would accept Werder's offer for the property. That meant a commission of about five thousand dollars for me. Perhaps some of you young millionaires wouldn't be interested in a five-thousand-dollar commission—but I was."

The reporters grinned. Conway had grinned first and they naturally followed suit. But probably they would have grinned anyhow.

"DID the letter come by mail or by messenger?" asked Foster.

"Oh! By mail, of course."

"And it didn't contain any hint of possible danger to Werder?" persisted the reporter.

"Eh? Lord! No! Not a word. Here's the letter."

Conway searched in his pocket and produced a somewhat crumpled missive.

"Want to read it?"

He held it out.

Foster took it.

"I'll read it aloud, if you don't mind," he said. " 'Dated, Mandan, North Dakota, February 1. Mr. Russell Conway, Electrolier Building, N. Y., Dear Sir., Please consider this a formal acceptance of your client's offer of one hundred thousand dollars for my ranch, "Bear Track." Please send deposit of ten thousand dollars at once to bind the bargain. Remaining payments as proposed by you. Very truly yours, Charles H. Morton.' All typewritten except the signature."

Foster stopped, glanced at the names and dates once more, so as to impress them on his mind, and passed the letter to the man nearest to him.

Then he turned back to Conway.

"This seems to be conclusive," he said. "I guess you are right. I, for one, sure would hustle if somebody hung up five thousand dollars for me across the street. Your idea is then, as I understand it, is that as the letter came by ordinary mail no would-be assassin would have known that it was coming and have been watching and waiting for you to go out so as to get into your room and shoot Werder?"

Conway nodded.

"That's it exactly," he said. "The thing is too preposterous. It sounds well in a dime novel, but in real life things don't work out that way."

"But somebody fired that shot from your window?"

Conway's face grew grave.

"It does look that way?" he admitted, frowningly. "Here! Come and look." He jumped up and led the way to one of the windows. "This seems to be the one," he went on, as the reporters clustered about him. "That's Werder's window just opposite. You can see the broken glass. Everything is just as it was yesterday, except that somebody has pushed up the upper sash. When I was in Werder's rooms the upper sash was down and the two holes were in a line. When I got home I looked out, of course, and I noticed that a line through those two holes really did come straight to this window, just as the *Gazette* says. Since the sash has been moved one of them is of course much higher than the other. But the two are still in line vertically."

The newspaper men each squinted at the evidential panes.

"How did the *Gazette* man find that out?" asked one of them.

"Search me! But I suppose he guessed it. The next window on the right is at the end of a corridor and I suppose the *Gazette* man looked out of it and risked a guess."

"Then the would-be assassin must have popped in here as soon as you went out and banged loose?" queried Foster.

But Conway shook his head.

"Ah! There I can't follow you," he demurred. "Nobody seems to know just when Werder's window really was broken. The elevator boy swears he washed it the day before and that it wasn't broken then. Of course he was frightened half out of his wits—and I guess he didn't have very many wits in the first place. But I was out of here that day from five o'clock till after midnight—I took Werder out to paint the town, as I told you just now—and somebody

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could have broken in here at any time during those hours."

"Didn't you look at Werder's windows while you were waiting for the letter?" asked Foster.

"Sure I did. And I'm bound to admit that I didn't see any broken pane. But his blinds were down and I don't believe any break would show very well against them. So far as I can make out, there isn't any real evidence that the windows weren't broken long before Werder dropped dead."

"Got any ice bullets handy about the place, Mr. Conway?" questioned another of the reporters. "Do you keep 'em in a refrigerator on the premises?"

Once more Conway frowned.

"—— it all," he exclaimed, irritably. "That's another thing that worries me. Look here!" He threw the window up and leaned out. "Feel here below the sill," he directed, with his finger on the spot. "What do you feel?"

The jesting reporter obeyed. Then, abruptly, his face changed.

"By George," he exclaimed. "I feel a lot of icicles as big around as my thumb."

"What else?" Conway's voice was tense. "Run your hand along the sill."

The reporter obeyed. Then:

"By George! One of them's missing," he cried.

"Exactly. There were about a dozen in all—and one in the middle has been broken off. Was it the 'ice bullet'. Who broke it off and what did he do with it?"

Nobody spoke. Nobody needed to. The application was obvious. But at last the chubby reporter grinned.

"Say! For Heaven's sake don't tell us any more, Mr. Conway," he pleaded. "Strange as it may seem, we aren't looking for confirmation of that *Gazette* yarn. Our papers don't want to play up *Gazette* scoops. What we really want is some justification for ignoring the blame thing or for throwing it down."

"I guessed as much," returned Conway, dryly, "but it can't be helped, I'm afraid —except, of course, that Werder wasn't shot. That ought to help some. Of course the icicle might have been broken off in a hundred ways. And as I said, the shot might have been fired hours before Werder's death. Anything else you want to ask, gentlemen?"

There seemed to be little. Except for half a dozen minor questions tending to elucidate points not quite clear in the minds of the interrogators, the answers to which threw no additonal light on the main question, little more was said. With cheerful "good mornings" the reporters turned to the door.

All but Mason. During the entire colloquy Mason had said nothing, though his sharp eyes had taken in everything. When the others turned away he was standing by the mantel, looking at a framed and glass-protected photograph. As the others started away he turned to Conway.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Conway," he said, in conversational tones. "The face in this photograph seems very familiar. May I ask whose it is."

Conway's face darkened. He glanced at the other reporters, who, alert for possible developments, had halted at the threshold.

"That is a dear friend of mine, now dead," he answered, shortly, in tones that were plainly resentful.

"Oh!" Mason put down the photograph. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Conway. The lady whom it recalled to me has also—passed away. Her death was—tragic. But I think now she sleeps well. Like Werder, the man who injured her is dead."

A shiver passed through the reporters at the door. Their brows contracted in involuntary protest. Very plainly one and all of them considered Mason's words to be in execrably bad taste. Even a reporter, inured to sensations as he is, dislikes to have one thrust upon him. Perhaps their own agitation prevented them from noticing the effect of Mason's words on Conway.

An instant later the real-estate man's expression had changed.

"Ah! I am sorry," he said, addressing Mason. "May I ask your name, sir?"

"Mason, of the *Gazette*."

"The *Gazette?* Ah!" Conway glanced at the pile of newspapers on the table. "Perhaps you wrote the story that appeared in the *Gazette* today?"

"I am associated with the man who wrote it," returned Mason, steadily. "I saw you at the Werder flat yesterday. I was the first reporter to get there, you remember."

"I see."

Conway did indeed begin to see. He saw, at least, that his words above Werder's body had been overheard. But he seemed to

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decide that the matter was unworthy of further inquiry.

"I am sorry your trouble should have been further recalled to you by the sight of my friend's likeness," he said, courteously. "Was your loss recent? Did the lady live in this part of the country?"

Mason nodded.

"Her sister lives in New Haven," he said. "By the way, I think I'll run down and see her tomorrow morning. Good morning, Mr. Conway; and thank you."

Leaving Conway staring uneasily, he followed the other reporters out of the room.

HALF an hour later, after making several miscellaneous inquiries, some of which were productive and others not, he strolled into the reporters' room at police headquarters.

The room was crowded. At least a score of reporters, regulars and specials, were firing questions at Detective Heber, who, back to the door, sat on one of the desks.

As Mason entered Heber raised his hands.

"One at a time," he protested. "One at a time. Gee! You boys make me tired. This ain't any suffragette convention. Now, here, you—" he pointed a lean finger at one of the reporters—"what you wanter know?"

"I want to know about that ice bullet," returned the man addressed, promptly.

"*Ahhhh*," Heber's groan expressed unbounded disgust. "Ice bullet,——. There warn't any ice bullets. Where Mason got that fool idea was out of one of those so-called detective stories that was printed somewheres a year or two ago. Somebody in the story shot a girl with an icicle; and ever since then chumps have been using the idea. It's all blamed nonsense. I tried that icicle dope out myself months ago an' found there wasn't nothing to it—nothing at all. An ice bullet flies to pieces when it's shot out of a gun or a pistol—'cept in a dime novel or in a paper like the *Gazette*, of course."

"But there really were ice splinters on the floor?" protested the spokesman.

"Who says there was? Nobody but Billy Mason. Naw! There warn't any ice splinters on the floor. There was glass, all right—and it's there yet."

"But something did break the window, didn't it?"

"Sure thing. An' it might have been a bullet from a pistol—I ain't sayin' it wasn't. But it's a lot more likely that it was a buckshot from a pea-shooter. Mason runs over to the Electrolier Building and squints at Werder's windows and dopes it out that a line from Werder's through the two holes will hit near about Conway's windows. That's too darn good a coincidence for the blithering idiot to let go. It never occurs to him that a boy with a pea-shooter in the street below could make those holes easy. A pea-shooter don't shoot straight like a pistol; it shoots in a curve. Ten to one it was some fool boy that did it."

"What does Conway say?"

"Conway?" Evidently Heber had not heard what Conway had said to the newspaper man half an hour before. "Conway's mad as hops," he asserted. "Says he's going to sue the *Gazette* for libel. He'll get big damages too. And he'll deserve them. It's a —— shame to let a paper like the *Gazette* libel decent people like Conway. Aw! It makes me mad to talk about it. If anybody had been shot there might be some excuse. But nobody was. There ain't a mark on Werder's body. This shooting business is just cooked up. And I ain't even sure that that window wasn't broken the night before or sooner. That elevator boy ain't got sense enough to know when he did wash them windows last."

The other men had discovered by this time that Mason was in the room. None of them spoke of it; in fact, each of them, after a glance at the young fellow, averted his eyes and pretended not to see him. Each realized that this was Mason's fight and was perfectly willing to let him conduct it in his own way. Newspaper-men are one of the most clannish bodies in the world; and at the same time are about the most sportsmanlike.

Nevertheless, the air of the room had grown tenser and tenser as Heber spoke; and at last the detective noticed it. Sharply he broke off and swung around. Then:

"Hello!" he snarled. "Look who's here. Come down to teach us how to solve mysteries, Sherlock, Jr?"

Mason met the other's sarcasm with a grin.

"Me?" he answered. "Naw! It's too tough a job for me! I can't teach you fellows anything. I'll leave the job to old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes. Say, Heber.

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Between you and me, didn't he scoop thunder out of all of us this morning?"

The detective colored angrily.

"With that rot?" he retorted. "You ought to get run in for printin'——"

"Me? Say, you don't think I write that Cap-Collier-and-the-rest-of-it stuff, do you? Thank you a whole lot. I only wish to thunder I could. But say, haven't you really run down the man that brought that letter to Russell Conway yesterday?"

"Didn't nobody bring it. It came by mail."

"Oh! did it?"

"Yes! It did."

Mason shook his head sadly.

"I'm afraid you'd be too tough a job for even our Sherlock Holmes to educate, Heber," he remarked, mournfully. "But I'll give you a tip. Chase around to the post-office and study the hours at which the letter-carriers are due at the Electrolier Building and find out when the mails from North Dakota got to New York yesterday. Then maybe you'll be able to figure out how a letter from there was delivered to Conway two hours before it got to New York by a carrier who wasn't in the building until an hour after the time when Conway charged over to Werder's rooms, hotfoot, to grab off his five thousand dollars. Get me? All right. Ta! Ta! Old man! Ta! Ta!"

CHAPTER V

MASON finished his second story on the Werder case much earlier than he had his first. Not only did he begin earlier, but the story itself was not so long and was much easier to write. All the explanatory details that required careful dovetailings to enable them to produce the desired effect he had told in the first story. These details had to be restated, of course, in the second story, for every newspaper article must be sufficiently complete in itself to enable a new reader who knows nothing of earlier reports to understand it.

This restatement, however, Mason knew that he could leave to the general story that would be written by Perkins, the regular police reporter. With this out of his way and with the story he wished to tell thoroughly digested and ready in his mind it was comparatively easy to put it upon paper.

THE FUGITIVE

The fugitive came from—God knows where—with the tan of ardent suns upon his blond face. He held his shoulders straight, as a one-time soldier should—but behind and within his steel-blue eyes lurked the fear of the hunted. As he came down the gangplank from the steamer he cast continual sidewise glances about him, as if fearing to see a waiting enemy. In his hand he carried a suitcase, but his manner of carrying it showed that it was both an unfamiliar and an unwonted burden. Cheaply dressed as he was, he did not look the sort of man that carries his own luggage.

The customs officers delayed him but little. He had declared nothing; and, though he had traveled first class, he looked like one who had almost nothing. The official who examined his suitcase may have guessed that he was fleeing, practically penniless, from the carnage in Europe, hoping to mend his fortunes in the New World. But the little that he said gave no confirmation of this.

Once off the pier, however, he straightened himself and tramped stolidly along till he came to a row of taxicabs. Abruptly turning, he sprang into one of these.

"Broadway and Thirty-third Street, at once," he commanded.

The chauffeur hesitated for a fraction of a second. To him, as to the customs officer, the man did not look opulent. Then, probably decided by the note of command that had rung in the man's voice, he started away.

Half a mile farther north, at the crossing of Fifth Avenue, the fugitive changed the orders. A mile more and he changed them again. And yet again. The changes were made unhesitatingly, with the air of one who knew the city well. At last, he stopped the car, got out, paid the driver his exact fare—no more—and lost himself in the crowd.

For the next few months he tried to hide himself in the great city. But he could not do it. Mere atom as he was among its toiling millions, like in face, in manner and in figure as he was to thousands of others, he could never believe himself unobserved. Wherever he went he could feel eyes upon him, boring into his mind, spying out his very soul. Much of this was probably mere imagination, born of inner terror;

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some of it was probably chargeable to the "spy" fever that was general in the big city; a little was perhaps due to the work of Secret Service men who were taking account of all foreign-looking visitors who were not fully accounted for; possibly none of it was due to the foes whom he dreaded.

But he thought that much or all of it was due to them—and, so far as he was concerned, it might just as well have been.

Curious things frightened him. Men—and women—of certain nationalities drove him away, quaking. One night, driven by fear of himself and of the dreams that haunted both his sleeping and his waking hours, he went into a big vaudeville house. For an hour he watched the performance with pleasure, almost with forgetfulness. Then the posters announced a Madame Ayesha and her pets; and a dark-skinned woman glided sinuously upon the stage—and he sprang to his feet and rushed from the house.

He never went back to his rooms. For some reason he believed that his enemies were close upon his track. He spent the night at a hotel; and the next day he sought out an agent—Russell Conway—and rented an apartment in one of the middle-aged, shabby, outclassed apartment buildings that stand on so many of the side streets between Thirtieth and Eightieth Streets.

Once established there he began to think himself safe—God knows why. He relaxed his vigilance. This was a mistake, for in his condition to relax was to let go altogether. Very soon loneliness, worse by far than any loneliness of the wilds or of the sea—the loneliness that cuts nowhere so deeply as in the haunts of men—rushed upon him. Very soon he began to make a companion of strong drink.

The habit grew upon him. Imperceptibly his shoulders began to sag. Then one day he saw again the dark-skinned charmer whom he had seen in the vaudeville house. He saw her from the elevator as she came from the door of an apartment on the floor below his. His view of her was only momentary, caught as the car sped upward, before the ceiling hid her.

But it was enough. Instantly he decided that she was after him. Perhaps he had injured a dark-skinned woman somewhere; perhaps he had merely been drinking too hard. Whatever the cause, he decided to flee. Two months, even two weeks before, he would have gone immediately, abandoning everything, as he had on the night when he had first seen her. But now his powers of decision had weakened.

He did not flee instantly. Probably he felt that flight inside the city would be useless. At any rate he telephoned to Russell Conway, and when the real-estate man came he directed him to buy for him with extreme secrecy a lonely ranch in the Northwest. Probably he hoped that the open plains would be kinder to him than the city.

That night he did not leave his rooms. Terror prevented him. Even the clamor of his drink-poisoned nerves for their daily dose of poison could not drive him out. At last he slept—fitfully.

He slept late, slept till the murky sun, rising above the Electrolier Building across the way, shone down into his room and painted a patch of gold in the middle of his rug. The light waked him and he sat up—or perhaps he did not really wake; perhaps what he thought he saw was only a dream phantasm painted by his racked brain.

But it seemed very real. As he struggled from his bed he heard a sound like that of dry leaves driven by November's blasts, saw the patch of gold upon the rug move, and saw it uprear a head, broad and flat, enormously expanded, bearing upon it the spectacle mark of Vishnu—the head of a cobra. Back he reeled, with an unearthly shriek; and instantly, to right to left, from every corner, came cobra after cobra till the whole room seemed one frightful den of serpents. Then he fainted.

Hours later, when he recovered, the snakes were gone.

But they came again. Night after night he could hear their rustling as he lay quaking in his bed; morning after morning he could see them writhing upon his floor, till his brain failed and unconsciousness claimed him. One thing and one thing only prevented him from fleeing—a vague belief that to flee would only be to transport these frightful visions to any place in the city in which he might seek refuge; and the coordinate vague belief that, when once Russell Conway found a ranch for him, he could go to it and escape.

Just why he thought his haunting terrors would not follow him to the Northwest is a question. After all, men must fix on something as a possible means of escape

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from their terrors; otherwise they will die. Werder fixed on the plains as his place of refuge. Therefore he waited, braving the nightly terrors of his room. Meanwhile he cut off his whisky—short.

For a time this had no effect on the reptiles. But at last there came a day when they did not appear; then another day, and another, and another. Werder rejoiced. He was getting back his strength and his poise.

Then came a shock—out of the blue sky. What was it? No one knows—yet. Perhaps it was mental, perhaps physical. Whatever it was, it was enough to drive him to action. Out into the streets he hurried. Where he went is not known. But at last he brought up at Russell Conway's rooms.

"I'm tired of waiting for that ranch," he rasped. "I will no longer wait. You betray me. I go."

Conway was dismayed. He had worked hard to find the ranch that Werder wanted. He thought that he had found it; and the prospect of losing his commission hit him hard. He protested, pleaded, explained that he would probably hear from the ranch people on the morrow.

But it was all to no avail.

"I go," insisted Werder. "I go, at once."

Conway changed his tune.

"Oh! All right," he laughed. "Go if you must, but don't go tonight. Be a sport. Tomorrow'll be another day. Come out to dinner with me and let's make a night of it. We'll take in one of those shows they get up for the tired business-man—all girls and glitter. Then go tomorrow if you wish."

Werder fell for it. Perhaps he did not want to fall for it. Perhaps he fought against doing so. Perhaps he was driven—pushed, against his will—by the veritable finger of God. But he did fall for it.

"Very good," he rasped, in his gruff drill-sergeant manner. "Tonight I stay. Tomorrow I go. I do not come back to you any more. I go."

Conway felt easier. He hoped to hear from the ranch people the next day; and if he did not—well, he had kept Werder one night; it would go hard if he could not keep him for another. So he took him out to dinner and helped him paint the town red. It was very late when Werder got back to his apartment. Futhermore, he was very drunk.

The next day the morning mail came but did not bring the expected letter to Conway. Wrathfully he strode to his window, and looked out. All Werder's blinds were still down.

Conway comforted himself. If the blinds were down Werder was probably still sleeping. Remembering the amount of liquor he had drunk Conway was not surprised. He guessed that if the man were not roused he would sleep very late. Before he waked, another mail might bring the desired letter. At any rate, it would be madness to disturb him.

Conway waited. And about noon came another mail with a letter for Conway. Perhaps it was the one he awaited; perhaps it was another. Whatever it was, its reading sent Conway racing madly for Werder's apartments, leaving his own apartment at the mercy of any assassin who might wish to use its window to fire into Werder's rooms.

Buzz, buzz, buzz, he clamored on Werder's bell. *Bang, bang, bang*, he pounded on the door.

"Werder! Werder! Werder!" he shouted through the panels.

Werder was still asleep, but he was on the point of awakening. The uproar startled him into movement. Half-aroused, still befuddled with drink, he leaped from his bed and rushed for the window and clutched at the blind. He loosened it; then the tension of the spring jerked it from his clumsy fingers and rolled it up with a rush and clatter and let the sunlight stream full into his blinded, sleep-dazed eyes.

Simultaneously came a crash. The window by which he stood yielded to the impact of a bullet fired almost certainly by an intruder in Conway's apartments—by the intruder who had been waiting for Conway to leave his rooms; and fragments of glass spattered against his half-clothed body. Startled, he looked down, and there, about his naked feet, he saw his aforetime scaly visitors, the very substance of his delirious nightmares, not one nor two but—to his drink-poisoned brain—dozens, scores, hundreds, writhing, coiling, heads aloft, staring through multitudinous spectacles.

He shrieked—of course—a shriek of unutterable horror; he fell; perhaps he

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moaned for a moment; perhaps the whir of his fleeting soul made the whistling sound that Conway and Armour heard and that sent Bob, the elevator boy, earthward to escape the voodoo devils of his ancestors. Whatever he did, it did not last long. Swiftly, vision, hearing, life itself, fled together.

When Armour and Conway broke through from the adjoining apartment he was dead. And the dream serpents had vanished.

THE city editor of the *Gazette* had been reading Mason's story page by page as it came, white hot, from the spinning platen. When he finished, he whistled.

"Look here, Billy," he protested. "This is going just a little too —— far. It's all right to cast suspicion on a live man, but to saddle a thing like this on a dead man——"

"Werder was a devil, a fiend incarnate," broke in the reporter, savagely. "The damnedest scoundrel I ever knew. I haven't told half about him yet. He—he——"

The city editor stared.

"Why, Billy!" he gasped. "I really believe you're taking this thing to heart."

"I am! You needn't worry about Werder. If half I've heard is true, he got a lot less than was coming to him. It's some comfort to believe that he's getting the rest of it now. There's got to be a hell to accommodate devils like him—" The reporter broke off. "No! No! You needn't worry about Werder," he finished, lamely.

Frowning and a little bewildered, the city editor turned away. Then he hesitated and came back.

"Look here, Billy!" he began. "How about the Ayesha woman? You're throwing suspicion on her pretty darned hard. Of course she won't really mind; it's good press-agent dope for her. But that won't stop her from putting up a holler and stinging us good and hard. Suing us would be more press-agent stuff."

Mason shook his head.

"She won't sue," he said.

"How do you know she won't?"

"She's gone—flew the coop. I warned her to go and she took my advice."

"What? Oh. I say. That's going some."

"That's right. Look here, Jim, there's more truth than poetry in this story. It isn't any fake—not a word of it. I took Madame Ayesha out to supper after the show last night; and I put things up to her straight. I remembered something that I had found when I first got to the fellow's apartments the day before—something that threw everything into perspective like a flash. I charged her outright with having killed Werder."

"What'd she say?"

"She swore she hadn't killed him, but she admitted some other things. Then Heber turned up, watching her. He'd been watching her all evening, as a matter of fact. I'd seen him before."

"Well?"

"She was game all right. She walked out of the café and looked him straight in the eye, fairly daring him to arrest her. He didn't do it; maybe his case wasn't complete; maybe he didn't have a case at all. But he will have. Probably he found out what I found before—and hid. Anyway, if he hasn't found it, he will. So, after I had taken Madame Ayesha home and had gotten the whole story from her I told her she'd better go, and she went. I didn't know whether Heber was trailing us, so I took her out of the building by the roof; there's an entrance from it into the sky-scraper next door. We didn't see Heber, and I put her on the train and let her go."

The city editor was staring.

"Good Lord," he protested. "You mean she killed him with her —— snakes. Why didn't you have her arrested?"

"For three reasons. First, the coroner had declared positively that Werder bore absolutely no sign of any wound, no matter how slight. And, second, Madame Ayesha told me why she hated Werder and I already knew enough about the circumstances to prove that she was telling the truth. And I sympathized with her; if she killed him she did exactly right. Third, from something she told me I believed that in fact she had not killed him. So I helped her to get away. And if it makes me an accessory after the fact, why, I guess I'll have to stand for it."

"But, but—what was the evidence you found at the broken door?"

"Two things. First, a grease spot, still moist, on the fringe of the rug. I tore some of it off and had it analyzed today.

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Second, a cylindrical plug of wood, somewhat bigger than a silver dollar, grained on both ends. When Conway broke into the room, he jolted it out of a hole of exactly the same size in the bottom of the door."

"Good Lord! What——"

"Moreover—" deliberately the reporter went on—"moreover the plug was smeared with mucilage which was not quite dry, else it would have held the plug in place. I put it back in, firmly."

"But——"

"The grease on the fringe was milk, which is much liked by snakes. The hole was big enough to let a good-sized snake pass through. The soft whistling that Conway and Armour heard is the way in which snake-charmers call their pets. Consequently——"

CHAPTER VI

THE staff of the *Gazette* felt pretty doubtful about Mason's snake story. In the first place, it was not a newspaper story at all; it fell nearly if not wholly into the class of fiction; and if there is anything that a newspaper-man objurgates it is fiction masquerading as fact. Newspaper stories containing many inaccuracies are a very different thing from climaxes that are planted and deliberately led up to.

Even six months' experience on a newspaper gives the veriest cub the instinct that enables him to pick out a fake almost unerringly; he learns that a story, any story, that is perfectly rounded and that distributes even-handed justice is almost invariably manufactured; and if the main story proves to be accurate, the alleged facts that it led up to have almost invariably been cooked. In real life things do not happen with poetic justice; and nobody knows it better than a newspaper reporter. The test of a true story is its incompleteness or its unsatisfactory ending. Real life is incomplete and unsatisfactory; it is only in heaven and in fiction that all ends well.

The staff of the *Gazette* put no faith in Mason's story. Probably not a single newspaper-man in the entire city did put faith in it. Laymen might believe it, but not reporters. Nevertheless the members of the staff liked Mason—most people did like Mason—and they wanted to congratulate him and josh him a bit. So on the morning on which it was published, they watched eagerly for him to appear at the office.

But Mason did not appear, and one by one the reporters scattered to their assignments. It was not until the last of them was gone that the city editor's telephone jangled and Mason's voice came over the wire.

"Hello, Hibbs," he called.

"Hello! That you, Billy? Where in thunder have you been? Come and receive bouquets and so forth."

"Can't for a while." Mason's refusal was prompt. "I'm just back from New Haven. Yes, I said New Haven. I went there on the owl train last night. I want to get to police headquarters quick. Anything doing at the office?"

"Um. Nothing special. I suppose you know Conway has skipped."

Mason chuckled.

"Don't worry about Conway," he said. "I've been talking with him all morning. I knew everybody would be after him last night, and I didn't want them to find him. So I made an appointment with him to meet him at his fiancée's."

"Where?"

"At his fiancée's in New Haven. He knew it was an appointment, if nobody else did; and he turned up all right. Say, Hibbs, I'm on the trail of a peach of a story, but I've got to investigate a lot first. Have you any more tips on the coroner's examination?"

"Only what we had this morning."

"Good. I'll probably see Perkins at headquarters, but you might phone him as to when a final report may be expected. I'll call up again later. So long."

Mason spoke the truth. He had gone down to New Haven on a late train the night before both in order to be there early the next morning and in order to make sure of a night's rest by putting it out of his power to do any investigating in connection with the Werder case. He could not prevent himself from thinking about it, of course; and he did not want to do so. In fact, he wanted a long quiet evening in which, undisturbed, he might think out some of the things that puzzled him worst; and he believed that he could get such an evening on the train.

Nor was he mistaken. Before he got

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off the train at New Haven he had decided on his course. Of course, if events took an unexpected turn he would turn with them. But until they did turn he would go straight on.

The next morning he made inquiries, and before nine o'clock he was mounting the steps of a house whose threshold he had never crossed but at which he was sure that he would find the object of his quest.

When a servant came in answer to his ring he nodded, said "Miss Gilbert," and strode into the parlor.

As he entered two persons rose to meet him. One was Conway. The other was a tall, handsome girl, who looked at him uncertainly.

But there was nothing uncertain about Mason. Briskly he went forward.

"Miss Gilbert, I presume?" he said. "I am Mr. Mason of the *Gotham Gazette.*" Then he looked past her and nodded. "Glad to see you, Mr. Conway," he said. "I was sure you would keep our appointment."

The girl did not answer. But Conway stepped forward.

"This is an intrusion, Mr. Mason," he said sharply. "I made no appointment with you; and Miss Gilbert knows nothing that can be of interest to the *Gazette.* Moreover, she would refuse to talk of it if she did. Me you can find at my apartment in New York tomorrow. I must ask you to withdraw at once."

But Mason shook his head.

"Believe me," he said, "I am sorry to intrude in this way. But I had to do it. A life, perhaps more than one life, is at stake. I do not want to interview Miss Gilbert. I do not want to bring her into this affair; and I will not do it. In fact, I came down here to try to see if I could keep her out of it."

"I don't believe you," Russell Conway broke in angrily. "You tricked me into coming here, and you followed me. It's an outrage."

"Perhaps. But it was very necessary. You don't quite realize the situation, Mr. Conway. Werder was really murdered; there isn't the least doubt about that. Moreover, you prevaricated about that letter; it did not come as you say."

"What?" Conway's tone was threatening.

Mason shook his head disgustedly.

"Oh! Quit bluffing," he said. "Read the New York morning papers and quit. I know what I am talking about. You did get a letter from North Dakota yesterday, and very probably it was about that property. But you didn't get it till several hours after Werder was dead. Consequently you didn't hurry to his rooms because of anything that you found in it. That much is certain. All New York knows it; and you will be asked to explain as soon as you get back. And you'll have a lot of trouble explaining after having said what you did say.

"From your point of view it was a good little lie, watertight and airtight. But if you had had a few years' newspaper experience you would have learned that no lie is airtight. It's almost impossible to dovetail truth into fiction without leaving some loose ends. This time the post-office fooled you—and you've got in pretty bad."

WHILE the reporter spoke Conway slowly wilted. His cheeks grew ashen and his knees seemed to weaken beneath him, despite his very evident effort to brace himself. Vainly he tried to find words for a reply.

The girl, however, who had been glancing from him to Mason and back again, came to his rescue.

"Let's sit down and talk things over," she said, pacifically, speaking for the first time. "I'm sure, Russell, that Mr. Mason hasn't any ill-will toward either you or me. Perhaps we can explain some of the things that seem to be troubling him and prevent—er—misconceptions of the truth from being published. Please sit down, Mr. Mason."

Mason bowed.

"Thank you," he said, as he took the proffered chair. "Talking it over is the very best thing we can do. Honestly and truly, I have only the kindest feelings toward both of you. I don't for an instant believe that Mr. Conway had anything to do with Werder's death. But I've got a very strong suspicion that he wanted to kill him, and that if he had found him alive he would have done his best to kill him. And that's going to be a hard thing to explain away, especially after he failed to tell the truth in the first place."

Abruptly Conway straightened.

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"You're right," he gritted. "You're right. I'd have shot Werder down like the dog he is. I wish to God I had had the chance. I'll tell you what he did, and you can judge——"

But the girl put her hand on his arm.

"Please!" she begged. Then she turned to Mason. "It's a terrible story," she said. "Is it really necessary to take it all up now? Russell did not know that Werder was involved until that very morning. He learned it from the letter that drove him to the man's rooms. And Werder was dead when he got into the room. Can't these old things be allowed to rest?"

The reporter nodded vigorously.

"Certainly they can, for the moment, at any rate," he acceded. "Perhaps they need never be raked up. Perhaps—" he hesitated. "Perhaps I know part of the story. I know enough to suffice for the moment, at any rate. Certain things, however, I must ask."

"Ask them." The girl's consent was instant.

This time it was Conway who turned prudent.

"But, Madge," he began. "I wouldn't——"

"I would. It's best to tell Mr. Mason everything he wants to know and trust him to protect us. I'm sure he will do it. And I want you to tell him everything that he asks you. Go on, Mr. Mason."

"Thank you." Mason turned to Conway. "First," he said. "I want to know the exact wording of the letter you found beside Werder—the letter that you read and then dropped—the letter that Heber found later."

Conway had grown a little easier. But at this question his brows wrinkled.

"So you saw that, did you?" he asked, resignedly. "I remember that you were the first newspaper-man to get to Werder's rooms—I saw you helping Armour to keep out the crowd—but I didn't realize how very much the first you were. I haven't the least objection to telling you about that letter. I can give you its very words. It said: 'Jewels in safe deposit box will be attached tomorrow early. Take warning.'"

"*Whee-ou!*" The reporter whistled softly. "That opens a new lead, all right, all right. Er—I suppose it was typewritten?"

"Yes."

"It would be, of course. By Jove, oh, by Jove."

"You've guessed something?"

With clasped hands, Madge Gilbert bent forward.

"Better say 'suspected something.' Or, better still, say I have found a key to old suspicions. Oh! It's nothing definite, nothing that I can tell; only an idea that may lead to some very important conclusions. Um! By the way, Mr. Conway! You don't happen to know whether Werder had those jewels with him when he was at your office the day before he was killed?"

Conway looked dubious.

"He had a rather small package with him," he answered, hesitantly. "I put it in my office safe for him. He got it before he left me that night. Do you think——"

"Oh! I don't know. It's possible. But now, Miss Gilbert, I want you to tell me something about your sister Edith."

Madge Gilbert dropped back in her chair, her color ebbing swiftly till her face was chalky white. Conway, on the other hand, leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair till his knuckles showed white with the strain.

"You know that?" he choked.

"I know something," admitted the reporter, "and I want to know more—not very much, but something. When did you last hear from her?"

"Not for more than a year!" Madge's voice was shaking with emotion. "She wrote from the American mission in Armenia, where she was teaching. Then came the Turkish campaign of murder—and she disappeared. We have heard nothing from her since. We have heard of her several times, indefinitely. I am sure she is dead. I do not think she could be alive."

"I understand." The reporter's voice shook almost if not quite as much as the girl's. "She did settlement and mission work in New York before she went to Armenia, did she not?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh! She did so much good. She saved so many who had seemed altogether lost. The people at the mission tell me that when the news about her came great rough hardened men broke down and cried—scores of them."

"They were—they had been, I should say—rather desperate men, some of them, had they not?" asked the reporter.

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"Oh! Yes! Some of them had terrible records."

"Do you know if she wrote to any of them?"

"Why! Yes—I believe she did write to two or three. There was a man called 'One-Armed' Sweeny—yes, I'm sure she wrote to him. And there was one named Fargus. I believe she wrote to him, too. She told me once that they were fighting very hard to go straight, and that she must help them all she could. Those are all that I know about, but there may have been and probably were others."

Mason nodded.

"I understand that there were," he said. "Now, Mr. Conway, one question more. What was in that letter you got—not the late one, but the one that drove you to Werder's rooms?"

Conway did not hesitate.

"It told me that it was Werder who had been the cause of Edith's death," he answered.

"I thought so!" Mason got up. "I'm obliged to you, Miss Gilbert," he said, "and to you, Mr. Conway, for your frankness. You shall never regret it. I—I knew your sister, Miss Gilbert, and I loved her. For her sake, if for nothing else, I will help you all I can. I think I will be able to divert suspicion from Mr. Conway very soon by turning it on the true murderer. Anyway, I'm going to try. Good morning."

On his way back to town Mason did a lot of thinking. The importation of "jewels" into the mystery troubled him. Everything that he had written about the case had been based on the theory that Werder had been killed out of revenge. Both the story of the bullet-holes in the window, which he had played up so lengthily the day before, and the story of the snakes, which must even then be in process of absorption by the sensation-loving dwellers of the metropolis, had been written from that point of view.

Now came this reference to an altogether different motive, a motive that had not even been suggested.

The very fact that it had not been suggested troubled Mason. Heber had the note that Conway had picked up and dropped again; and Mason did not doubt that he was combing the city for its author and also the safe-deposit box in which the jewels were said to lie. The fact that he had kept the note secret; that not even the newspaper-men who stood closest to him appeared to have suspected its existence, might be simply a police measure to avoid frightening the criminal—if criminal there were. On the other hand, it might be due to other causes which Mason sensed dimly.

Whatever the cause, it might be ruinous to his newspaper reputation, if nothing more. At any moment Heber might find the writer of that note and might prove him to be an ordinary thief. He might even obtain a confession clearing him. And if he did obtain anything of the sort Mason knew very well that the facts would be conveyed quietly to the two or three newspapers that supported the exitsing administration and not to the others.

Such things had happened before, not once, but many times. Mason knew well that even a partial solution, backed by an arrest, would kill any future stories that he could produce. The public would lose faith in him, and the members of his own profession would waggle fingers of scorn at him.

His only chance was to find out what the jewels had to do with the case before the police did, and this would be a difficult task. Heber had at his disposal almost unlimited resources and power for running down any professional thief. And he had had two days' start. Mason knew that he could not beat him by following any of the methods he would naturally adopt. He must strike out some wholly different method of his own. If he could do that and if luck were with him. . . .

The train jolted to a stop in the Grand Central station and Mason hurried away to call up the *Gazette* office.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Mason saw the New York morning papers he found that they contained many bits of information about the Chimneystack mystery that did not appear in his own story. They had, for instance, an announcement by the coroner stating that the most minute examination of Werder's body had failed to show any wound or even abrasion of the skin, and adding that the vital organs of

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the body were still being examined for traces of poison.

They also had a group of items dealing with Conway. First came the interview with him telling about the letter from North Dakota. Next came a dispatch from North Dakota saying that C. H. Morton was a well-known real-estate man, and that his records showed the mailing of the letter that Conway had received, but that he knew nothing of Werder, whose name had not been mentioned by Conway during the negotiations.

This was followed by a positive declaration from the city post-office that no ordinary mail could possibly have been delivered at Conway's rooms, from Dakota or anywhere else, at the hour specified, because at that very moment the carriers for that section of the city were all in the post-office making up their mail for the next delivery. Last came a brief statement, in nearly every paper, to the effect that all efforts to locate Mr. Conway during the evening had been unsuccessful.

Faced by the flat contradiction between Conway's statement and that of the post-office officials, most of the papers found themselves compelled to adopt Mason's hypothesis that the "postman" who delivered the letter at his apartments was the man who, after getting Conway out of the way, had entered the rooms and fired the ice-bullet that broke Werder's window. A postman can go anywhere in the world without being noticed; everybody takes him for granted. Most of the papers found the ice-bullet hypothesis hard to swallow and derided it even while they adopted it. But the facts seemed to speak for themselves.

The *Gazette*, in a short editorial, adopted Mason's story as absolutely correct and referred plenteously to the extraordinary aid in the detection of crime that the *Gazette* had once more rendered to the police. It added cheerfully that the police were probably doing their best; and that their failure to solve the mystery was due not to lack of good-will but merely to lack of ability.

Newspaper-men generally, and especially those at police headquarters, chuckled among themselves over this wind-up. But they chuckled privately; it was not altogether safe to chuckle openly on the subject in the presence of the headquarters staff of the "finest."

Everybody at headquarters, however, both police and reporters, understood or thought they understood the *Gazette* attacks. Unhesitatingly they assigned all of them, including Mason's quarrels with Heber, to the fact that the *Gazette* was anti-administration and normally lost no chance to deride any part of the city Government. Consequently, nobody took the attacks too seriously. Nevertheless Mason's outspoken scorn bit, the more so as it rested on a basis of fact.

The police were "sore" at discovering—as they believed they had discovered beyond peradventure of a doubt—that the letter from Dakota had really reached Conway several hours after the tragedy was over, and therefore could not have driven him to Werder's rooms. It seemed to follow that Conway had deliberately falsified, and, as he could not be found, that he had very probably taken flight. When, moreover, they discovered that Madame Ayesha had also disappeared, their state of mind may be very moderately described as distinctly irritated.

Mason knew this, but he nevertheless hurried from the train to police headquarters and pushed into the press-room as coolly and deliberately as he had on the day before, arriving, as it happened, just in time to find Heber talking, also much as he had on the day before. Very possibly Heber was there because he hoped that Mason would appear; certainly he once more placed himself with his back to the door and proceeded to hold forth loudly and fluently on the subject of the *Gazette* and Billy Mason.

"Did I read the yarn in the *Gazette?*" he burst out when the question was put to him. "Sure I did. I always read Billy Mason's stuff. That boy's had the experience all right and he knows what he's writing about. Get about three drinks in him and he can see a whole zoo of red and blue snakes and forty-foot lizards. An' he can fight 'em, too; no matter how often you tell him they ain't really there."

"Does Billy drink?" asked somebody.

"Drink? Oh! No! He don't drink. Say, just between you an' me I saw him when he came back from the other side of the water, an' I wouldn't have given two cents for his life. Since then he can't hold liquor like he used to. It's a shame that

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anybody as smart as he is—I know he's smart because he owns up to it himself—it's a shame that anybody as smart as he is can't drink anything stronger than a soda phosphate without gettin' a case of D. T."

"But was this D. Ts.?" persisted the reporter. "The Ayesha woman disappeared."

"Course she's disappeared. Say, you don't mean to tell me you boys fell for that press-agent dope. Course she's gone. She's aimin' to figure in the papers for about three days—till we find her. Then she'll do the high and mighty and show that she's been on some perfectly innocent trip to some place where the horrid newspapers don't come; and that she hasn't known a word of the dreadful pieces they have been printing about her.

"She'll come back to town and send for her lawyer and sue the *Gazette* for a hundred thousand or so—and that ought to be good for a half a column at least in every paper in the city. Then on the strength of all that adventure she's planning to soak some impressario for a ten-thousand-dollar contract. After that she'll whack up with Mason and drop the suit. The *Gazette's* circulation will have run up 'steen thousand and everybody'll be happy except the poor nuts of city editors on the papers that fell for the stuff. It's good press dope, all right—if she can get away with it."

"Well! Won't she get away with it?"

"If she does, she'll have to do it without the help of the police. We ain't hanging out any rewards for her. But I s'pose some rube constable will bring her in soon without our asking. Oh! Yes! I guess she'll make good on it."

"HELLO!" Mason loafed forward. He had decided on his course. "Say, Heber," he said, "I want a permit to visit Werder's rooms. Old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes thinks that you fellows have foozled your job and haven't half searched the place. He wants me to see whether I can't see some evidence of those jim-jam snakes—how they got in and out and all that, you know."

Scornfully Heber glared at the reporter.

"You know —— well how you're going to claim that they got in!" he growled. "And I know too. You can't pull any of that correspondence-school detective business on me. I found that plugged hole in the door two days ago."

Mason laughed, but he seemed considerably disconcerted.

"Bravo, Heber," he cried. "You really have found something, after all. I'm beginning to have hopes for you!"

But the detective refused to be turned aside by any persiflage.

"That's all right. I've stung you good and plenty," he snarled.

Mason shrugged his shoulders.

"All right! I'm stung," he agreed. "Have it your own way, Heber. But please, sir, may I see the rooms again?"

Heber did not answer directly. Instead, he turned to the other reporters.

"There's a hole in the bottom of the side door of Werder's room," he explained. "Probably it's a knot-hole that was plugged long ago. When the door was busted in, the plug was jolted out. The hole's big enough to let a snake through, all right. The brilliant young commissioner of the *Gazette* found it and went and saw the Ayesha woman and framed up that pipe-dream he printed this morning. Now, he turns up here and throws a bluff at getting all you boys up there so's he can find the plug while you're looking and make a big chest and say what a fine detective he is, so there."

Mason laughed, though not very convincingly.

"I don't want to go to the rooms to hunt for plugs," he retorted. "I can find plenty elsewhere. If you've found one, so much the better. I'm glad to know that you've found something. And anyway, it isn't I who wants to go to the rooms. It's Old Cap Collier-Vidocq——"

"Oh! To —— with Cap Collier!" broke in the detective, disgustedly. "If you want to go to the rooms you can go. And—" he glanced at the other reporters—"the rest of you boys can go too if you want to. But you won't find anything. And I tell you right now, Billy Mason, you ain't going to get a chance to plant anything on me—not while I'm there, you ain't. See?"

Once more Mason laughed.

"Neither I nor the *Gazette* wants to plant anything on you, my dear Mr. Heber," he said.

"Don't you? Well, I wouldn't put it by you," retorted the detective. "Come along."

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Half a dozen of the reporters followed Heber, and two or three others telephoned to their respective officers to send men to meet the party at the Chimneystack Apartments; so that it was a very sizable party that a little later ascended to the Werder rooms.

Armour saw the party when it gathered at the foot of the elevator—and promptly joined it. The fat little manager had lost some of his rotundity since Werder's death. His clothes no longer seemed about to burst their seams; and his once plump cheeks showed lines that were surprisingly deep to have been acquired in only two days. Moreover, his eyes were haggard.

Mason noticed the change in him instantly, but it is doubtful whether any of the other reporters did. Mason had seen him on the day of the murder and so had a better chance to notice the change in his condition than had any of the others. Moreover, he had a key to the little man's worry that the others lacked.

"Heber's been sweating him to death about the way that jewel thief might have got in," he decided, the moment his eyes fell on the manager.

Nevertheless he determined to try to extract some further information from him later.

Heber glared at the little man. Heber always glared at people over whose affairs he held temporary control. He believed in frightfulness—or at least in terrorizing—any one whom he could; in fact, his feud with Billy Mason dated from the failure of an attempt he had made to terrorize that young fellow. On that occasion Mason had told him flatly that he had the manners of a Prussian drill sergeant, an assertion that for some reason had shut the big fellow up.

Armour was easy game, scarcely worth frightening, but Heber bullied him mechanically, almost without thinking about it.

"Here, you," he rasped. "I want you. Get in the elevator."

Armour got in. Mason noticed that he was trembling and made mental note of it. If the manager abhorred Heber hard enough and was not too much afraid he might be of aid to the reporter.

On the sixth floor, at the entrance to Werder's rooms, Heber turned upon Mason.

"See here, Mason," he said. "I want you to understand I'm not standing for any funny business. You stay by me right along, an' God help you if you try to plant anything on me. Get that?"

His words ended with a snarl.

"Sure! I get it," retorted the reporter. "Fat chance I've got to plant anything on you."

"You're mighty right you haven't. And you're not going to have."

Heber turned away.

But Mason stopped him.

"Hold on," he snapped. "I guess you want a show-down, and you're going to have one. Your men have been in charge of these rooms for two days, haven't they? And they've searched them from top to bottom, haven't they? And they haven't found anything important, have they? And you think there's nothing to be found, don't you? Well, I think you're wrong. I believe there is something to be found. Maybe I'm wrong. We'll see about that. But if I do find it I don't want any guff about my having planted it on you. See?"

Mason's eyes met Heber's full and square.

"Yes, I see! An' if you find anything I haven't found—all right."

"Good. That's understood. Now let's go in."

At Heber's rap the main door of Werder's apartment opened and an officer appeared.

To him Heber spoke.

"You see this man, Casey?" he questioned, pointing at Mason.

The patrolman nodded.

"Yes, sor! I see him," he answered.

"Keep your eyes on him as long as he's in these rooms. Watch everything he does. If he tries to plant anything, grab him."

"Very good, sor."

Heber turned to the newspaper-men.

"Walk in, gentlemen," he invited, and led the way.

INTO and through the main room he strode, into the room where Werder's body had been found, and on to the splintered side door. Here he stopped and glanced at the throng of reporters, on whose outer edge stood Mason, with Officer Casey close beside him.

"Here's the door, gentlemen," he said. "And here's the plugged hole."

Swiftly he bent and fingered the lower part of the door. An instant later he stood

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up, holding in his hand the cylindrical piece of wood that had nearly tripped Mason two days before. A hole through the door showed the spot from which he had taken it.

"It didn't come out as easy as that when I found it," he said. " 'Cause why; somebody had had it out and had poked it back in with some mucilage on it to hold it. Billy Mason lets on that he knows who did it Well! I guess he does know. I guess he knows more about that plug than anybody else. But he isn't telling all he knows. So I'm going to tell you myself. There was a knot-hole in the wood of this door. The knot was lost out and the factory made a plug and fitted it in nice; an' it stayed there till Mr. Russell Conway busted the door and jolted it out.

"Billy Mason sneaked up here early an' found it an' put some mucilage from the jar on the table yonder on it and poked it back in. That's just like those *Gazette* reporters; they're always planting things and then finding them. Night before last he took that Ayesha woman out to supper and between them they fixed up this song-and-dance snake story. See?"

The newspaper-men nodded. Very evidently they did see.

Undoubtedly Heber had the best of the situation. Triumphantly he turned to Mason.

"Here you are, Billy Mason," he jeered. "Here's your hole all right. Now go 'long an' find what you came to find—if you can."

Mason appeared to be trying hard to rally himself.

"Give me a little time!" he jibed. "I came to look for something, not to find something that I knew was here. Give me time!"

Without waiting for an answer he turned away and began to stroll about the rooms, peering into one place after another. Behind him, step by step, moving as he moved, came the watchful Casey, while from a little distance, the other reporters looked on, chuckling to themselves. They liked Mason, but they were all quite ready to enjoy a good joke on him.

Mason understood their feelings perfectly. He even sympathized with them. But he also realized that the situation was no joking one for him. He had not come to Werder's rooms to seek something that would corroborate his snake story. He had come to seek for something that would elucidate the mention of the jewels in the note that Conway had picked up from the floor. In his desire to hide his true errand he had gone too far and had allowed Heber to force him into a position where he had to find something startling or be discredited in the eyes of his friends. Desperately he racked his brain for something that might save the day; and desperately his eyes swept the rooms for something that might give him inspiration.

Strive as he might, however, he could find nothing. Everything seemed to be exactly as it had been on the fatal morning when he had first come to it. And yet—and yet—somehow it was borne in upon him that everything was not as it had been. Some change, radical and yet almost intangible had taken place. If he could discover what it was, he felt somehow that he might yet win out. Frowningly he stared.

Then abruptly revelation came to him. The gas that had been burning at the dresser at the window at his first visit had been put out. That was the difference that he had sensed. And the discovery of it did not help him.

Laughingly, though a little irritably, he turned to Armour, who was standing near him.

"Who put the gas out?" he asked.

Under the seemingly innocent question the manager staggered back. The blood fled from his swarthy cheeks, leaving them ashen. His eyes expanded till they seemed about to pop from their sockets. His legs absolutely crumpled beneath him. Mason was just in time to catch him as he fell, unconscious, to the floor.

Instantly uproar broke forth. That a strong full-grown man should faint like a weak school-girl seemed incredible. From all sides the reporters pressed in, demanding an explanation.

Mason, however, paid no attention to them. The need of attending to Armour gave him full excuse for the moment. When, later, he and Casey had placed the manager upon the bed he had determined upon his answer.

"I don't know what made him faint," he prevaricated. "I was talking to him casually—and he just fainted. That's all there is to it."

Mason spoke the truth. He did not know what had made Armour faint. But

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he was sure that the little man had not done so without some very good cause. He knew that he had fainted when asked about the gas; and he asked himself why in thunder so simple a question should have had so startling an effect.

Furtively he scanned the fixture.

To all appearances it was like a million others that appear in a million homes—an ordinary gas jet which could be lighted either by a match or by a spark from a dry battery by pulling down a short chain or bar.

After a while, however, the reporter discovered that, after all, it was not exactly like a million others, for it lacked the connecting wire which should have been present to bring the spark.

Puzzled now in good earnest he stared harder than ever. And as he stared, an idea, nebulous, inchoate, but still an idea, began to shape itself in his brain.

FOR a moment he turned the matter over. Then he swept the circle of reporters with a glance.

"Armour dropped just where Werder did and just as suddenly," he said in a curious tone.

Like a flash a shiver swept through the room.

He had spoken the truth. Armour and Werder had fallen on the very same spot and apparently with the same abruptness. Why?

Reporters are all imaginative. They have to be to hold their jobs. It took about two seconds for those present to draw the inevitable corollary.

The spot where Werder and Armour had fallen was dangerous.

Again why? Uncertainly the reporters stared at it as if expecting that the spot itself would answer. Heber, who had kept silent for the last few minutes, seemed absolutely bewildered.

Mason did not wait for an answer. He looked for one. Stepping closer to the window and the wall he peered behind the dresser just beneath the gas bracket, first at the floor, then higher.

Then, abruptly, he pointed.

"Something is wedged between the dresser and the wall," he said quietly. Pull the dresser out, Casey!"

His tone was compelling and Casey obeyed instantly, without thought, as a matter of course.

Instantly there fell to the floor, in the sight of all, the dead body of an Indian cobra.

Everybody looked at the dead snake; then everybody looked at Heber.

The detective was choking with mingled amazement and rage. His face was scarlet. Furiously he flung out a shaking finger at Mason.

"You planted that," he yelped.

Mason shook his head wearily.

"You know better than that," he said, quietly. "Talk sense, Heber! You've had these rooms under guard since the day of Werder's death."

"That snake wasn't there yesterday."

Mason shrugged his shoulders.

"As to that I don't know. But I'll tell you one thing; and that is that the *Gazette* had mighty good reason to believe that there was something scaly in this business before we printed that delirium-tremens story this morning. I came back here to look for something and I found it. You'd have found it too, if you hadn't been so crazy to throw the *Gazette* down. Old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes told me what to look for and I looked. You scorned the *Gazette* and looked for something else. So you didn't find it; that's all."

Heber's face was scarlet. For a moment more than one who saw him expected him to drop with apoplexy. Then, with an effort, he threw off the incubus that weighed upon him and lurched toward Mason.

"—— you. I'm going to run you in," he yelped.

Mason's eyes widened.

"Run me in?" he gasped. "What for?" Then he began to shake with uncontrollable laughter. "Well," he choked. "It might be a pretty good thing from your point of view. What you going to charge me with, Heber?"

Heber's bloodshot eyes bored into those of the younger man.

"You know too —— much about this thing," he roared. "You've been too much of a Johnny-on-the-spot. You know things that nobody could know but the man that killed Werder——"

"Oh! Then somebody did kill Werder, did they? I thought the coroner said that——"

"Never mind what the coroner said. You're mixed up in this thing somehow, and you're coming with me to the district attorney."

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"Glad to!" Mason's consent was immediate. "I'll be delighted to see the district attorney any time he wants to see me. As for arresting me—well, just remember I'm no friendless Bowery pup that you can jug indefinitely and put through the third degree and all that. You've got to admit me to bail or take me before a judge and show good cause for holding me—or I'll habeas corpus you and make you do it. And the judge will admit me to bail, unless you've got a real case against me. And you know you haven't. Bah! I'll be out in half an hour. But come along if you want to."

The detective scowled, but he did not answer. He knew perfectly that Mason spoke merely the truth; and much as he longed to see the reporter behind the bars he did not quite dare to arrest him. If he did, the *Gazette* would undoubtedly say things. And very probably even the administration papers would echo them. These newspapers had a way of standing together when their privileges were menaced or their representatives were hampered. And if they did make a concerted howl he might be offered up as a sacrifice, and that would certainly not suit his book.

Slowly his hand fell from the reporter's shoulder.

"You win," he said, briefly. "I ain't going to arrest you—yet. But I believe you've had something to do with this here murder, and I'm going to get you for it sooner or later. Understand?"

"Sure, I understand, Heber. Go as far as you like."

"I will." The detective's tones were menacing. "I will—when I get ready. Don't you make any mistake about that. Meanwhile, I want to know what you think you've proved by finding that snake?"

"Proved?" Mason laughed outright. "Proved? Well, I'll tell you that, too—in the *Gazette* soon. Watch for it."

THE room was buzzing like a hive of angry bees. The newspaper-men were in no doubt as to what the hole in the door and the finding of the snake proved. Coupled with the story in the *Gazette* that morning and with the flight of Ayesha, they formed a chain of evidence that seemed indisputable. The fact that the coroner had declared that there was not the least sign of a wound in Werder's body counted for absolutely nothing.

Werder had been killed by the bite of a cobra, introduced through the hole in the door by Ayesha; Mason had gotten the story from her and had let her escape in order to get a scoop—such was the unanimous verdict. One or two of the men, who represented afternoon papers, raced away to find telephones and send in a bulletin of the startling discovery. The rest turned on Mason.

Professional ethics forbade them to cross-question him. None was so simple as to suppose that he had exhausted his sensations. Beyond a doubt he had a story to spring the next day; and some day in the future they too might have a scoop which they would not want to share with him. So they asked nothing. But they looked volumes.

Mason, however, showed no intention of making further explanations. In point of fact the discovery of the snake, though he had taken instant advantage of it to score over Heber, had been nearly as much a surprise to him as it had been to the others.

Ayesha, indeed, had owned that she hated Werder and that she had sought to terrify him by sending her pets into his room. And she had admitted that one of them had failed to return to the lure of the milk and the charm of the whistle on that last morning when the sound of Conway's and Armour's approach had driven her to hide until their passage into Werder's room over the broken door had given her a chance to flee. But she had insisted also that none of her snakes was capable of dealing death.

Could she have lied—or erred? Could this one snake have retained his fangs?

Mason decided to find out. Calmly he bent to the snake, pulled back its hinged upper jaw, and peered into its wide mouth. Then he spoke.

"Look," he said. "This snake is harmless. The poison sacs behind its fangs have been extracted. It could not have killed Werder."

A groan of disgust greeted Mason's last words. Not a reporter there but felt personally aggrieved. The story each was shaping in his busy brain had suddenly become junk.

"Three groans for Billy Mason," said somebody.

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Mason grinned.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "I've killed one story, I'm afraid. But I'll give you all a chance for another in its place. What killed this snake?"

Sure enough, what had killed the snake? Magically, hope swelled in the reporters' breasts.

If the snake had been anything but a snake the cause of its death would not have gone so long unquestioned. But being a snake, the cause of its death naturally seemed of little consequence compared to the fact that it was dead.

This particular snake bore no apparent wounds. It was simply dead. Moreover, examinations, made rather gingerly by one reporter after another, offered no solution to the problem. Finally one of the men voiced the universal feeling.

"Take it to the coroner," he suggested. "Maybe he'll find that Werder bit the snake and the snake bit Werder."

Mason did not hear the proposal. Three seconds before it was made he had slipped from the room unobserved, even by Casey, who doubtless considered that his orders to watch the reporter had been canceled by events.

Mason had left the room with a definite end in view. He, at least, had an idea as to how the snake had died; and he wanted to verify his suspicions. Up the stairs of the building he hurried, flight after flight, till he reached a door that gave access to the roof and slipped through it into the open air.

He had been there before when he aided Ayesha to avoid Heber's possible espionage.

High above him rose the windswept heavens; and 'round about him soughed the chill blasts.

The north wind cut like a hundred knives and in it Mason shivered like a man with the ague. To brave it was dangerous to one in his state of health. Nevertheless he did not hurry down again.

Up and down upon the nearly level tin he went, seeking minutely for something that was evidently hard to find.

At last he stopped short with a startled exclamation. On the tin, at his feet, lay a silvery splash, like tinfoil, but rayed in a hundred points. In it was pressed the point of a man's finger. A great drop of melted lead, falling a few feet, would have produced just such a splash; and nothing else that Mason could think of could.

Strain his eyes as he might, however, he could see no possible source from which the splash could have come. Above and around him towered plenty of higher buildings and over him stretched many wires, but none of these seemed to offer a possible explanation.

At last, slowly, in a brown study, he started toward the door by which he had gained access to the roof.

Just as he was about to enter it he heard some one stumbling up the steps, running, panting with the exertion. Back he sprang and around the roof that sheltered the door he whisked. Then he crouched down and waited.

An instant later Armour rushed out. Straight as an arrow he ran to the silver splash and dropped upon his knees beside it and with desperate haste began to scrape it away.

Cautiously Mason slipped up behind him and watched him for a moment. Then he spoke.

CHAPTER VIII

MASON was awake betimes on the morning after he had surprised Armour on the roof. He knew that the story he had written the night before and that would appear in the *Gazette* that very morning was what he himself termed a "corker," but he also knew that the administration newspapers might very well be printing synchronously a jewel-thief explanation that would completely take the wind out of his sails.

He had sat up till nearly two o'clock to see the mail editions of the rival papers and had been relieved to find nothing of the sort in them. But he was almost equally afraid that it might appear in later issues.

When the newsboy that he had subsidized came to his rooms with the city editions of the papers, and he found that once more he had scored, his relief was enormous. Over in the bed he flopped and settled himself to complete his broken rest. Not even did he wait to read his own story—a thing that all newspaper-men do.

But others read it:

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THE AVENGERS

WHOSE HAND STRUCK THE BLOW?

Werder, sentenced to death, escaped some of the would-be executioners.
But not all of them.

The coroner still insists that Werder's body bears no wound and that the cause of his death is still uncertain. Very likely this assertion is mere verbal camouflage, forced on the coroner by the police in an effort to prevent the murderer from taking alarm and fleeing. As if he had not done so already! The police are really nearly as intelligent as the Government war censors, who withhold from the people of the United States information that the Germans have known for weeks. According to the police ideas, all criminals wait for a formal announcement that they are "wanted" before they discover that they have committed a crime and that it would be well for them to try to save themselves.

The exact cause of Werder's death is not yet known, but the fact that he was murdered is no longer open to question. For weeks he was dogged by assassins who at last closed in on him. Perhaps these assassins were working together—were acting on the orders of some central authority. More probably they were acting independently; and almost certainly they were following methods devised by themselves individually. In any case, none of them was a mere hired butcher; all or nearly all of them, even if acting under orders, were taking personal vengeance for more or less personal injuries.

What were these injuries? No one knows as yet. But they must have been terrible ones, wide-reaching, unforgivable. Nor is it known as yet whose hand finally loosed the long-impending punishment. Indeed, it is not certain that some private murderer, alien to the band of avengers, did not rob them of their triumph for mere sordid motives.

Nothing is known to have been stolen from Werder's rooms, but this may be merely because no one knows what was there. Perhaps Werder brought something to his rooms only a few hours before he was slain—something that dates far back in time and thousands of miles away in distance!

Old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes, the *Gazette* detective, explains below the diabolically ingenious plot by which one of the avengers thought to execute justice on his enemy.

Werder was run to earth by the avengers weeks—perhaps months—ago. Perhaps he was under surveillance from the moment he set foot on American soil. Ships are fast, but the electric cable is faster; and it is quite possible that the news of his prospective arrival at New York had preceded him. Secret dispatches do get through despite the censorship. But whether or not his coming were known before he arrived, it was known beyond a doubt before he had been in the big city for very many days. His offense had been grievous—so much is certain; and the word had gone out that an example must be made of him, both as a punishment and in order to deter others who might think to follow in his footsteps.

He was found, watched, followed, hounded to the limit of endurance and finally was slain. Beyond a doubt the news of his death—and the reason for it—is today being passed from mouth to mouth over half the world, and is being received with mingled fear and rejoicing—with anything but regret. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* does not apply to devils like Werder. He lived as a wild beast and he died as one.

How he was hunted from pillar to post has already been told. How he was driven to the verge of delirium tremens and was tortured with not only the fanciful snakes of his delirium, but also by the real if fangless serpents that were loosed upon him by his enemies, was indicated in the *Gazette* yesterday morning, twenty-four hours before one of these snakes was found in his apartment, dead from some unexplained cause—perhaps the same cause that killed Werder himself.

Today the *Gazette* unfolds the story of another attack—an attack that may or may not have caused Werder's death. Whether it did or not we shall know when the coroner, in his own good time, sees fit to inform the country as to the cause of his death.

THE SILVER SPLASH

The Chimneystack Building is not new. It was built at least ten years ago, before the land on which it stands had grown so

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valuable for business purposes. Since it was erected other buildings have shot up about it, dwarfing its twelve stories into insignificance. Today if it were not for the chasm of the street on which it fronts, its roof would appear to an aviator as if placed at the bottom of a well.

This condition has consequences. One of them is that access to its roof is comparatively easy. From one of the contiguous buildings it may be reached by a tall door-window; and from any of the others by the aid of a rope, a certain amount of courage, and undisturbed possession of any one of more than a hundred windows that look down upon it. From and between these windows run many wires—telephone and electric—including one whereon the wife of one of the janitors hangs her wash on Sundays, when no one is likely to see and object.

From the roof, access is easy to the interior of the Chimneystack Building—a name once appropriate, perhaps, but now ridiculous—through a door that even today is unfastened and that probably has been unfastened for weeks, if not months past.

Late one afternoon some days ago a man was working on this roof. Whether he had descended to it from a window of one of the neighboring buildings or had come up through the Chimneystack itself is not important. However he came, he was there. He worked openly, doing what he had come to do without the slightest pretense at concealment. No doubt dozens of people saw him without really noticing him. Those who thought of him at all of course supposed that he was a workman making repairs. Perhaps some few wondered why he was working so late. After a while he vanished through the door into the interior of the building.

A little later he entered Werder's apartments. Undoubtedly he knew that Werder would not be at home, and that he would have time to do what he had come to do. Swiftly and intelligently he worked; and when he went away he left no trace of his visit to arouse the suspicions of the rightful tenant.

Where he spent the next few hours is uncertain; perhaps he found them long and anxious hours, for this was the night on which Werder had accompanied Russell Conway to dinner and to the theater. Or, perhaps, he had learned in some way that Werder would not be home until late and therefore had not worried over his non-arrival. Certain it is, however, that before Werder did appear he had returned to the roof and had completed there the last details of his work.

This done, he crouched down and waited, in the cold and the dark, till close beside him he heard a *plop* upon the roof. Exultantly he put out an inquiring finger, then with an exclamation he jerked it back and put it into his mouth.

It had been burned.

An instant later, however, he forgot his pain, for he was sure he knew what must have caused it. In the pitchy darkness he stood up and stretched exultant arms to heaven.

"Dead!" he cried. "Dead! The dog! Dead!"

Then he went away, not knowing that he had left his finger-print recorded in the molten silvery splash that had at once burned him and notified him—falsely—that Werder was dead.

With the next morning came Werder's drunken sleep, prolonged beyond custom; Russell Conway's insistent clamor at the door; Werder's startled awakening and leap from the bed; his horror at finding himself surrounded by snakes—real or imaginary; his clutch at the window-blind and at the pull of the gas-fixture; the crash of the ice bullet from the Electrolier Building as it tore its way through the broken glass. And then the swift arrival of the King of Terrors.

Swiftly, too, came other arrivals. First came Armour and Conway; then the police reporters and the police; then a miscellaneous crowd of morbid sightseers. And among these arrivals, whether among the earlier or the later comers, there came, be sure, the man who had laid the snare.

Beyond a doubt he was bewildered. The result had come as he had expected, but it had not come at the time when he had expected. He had supposed that Werder had perished hours before, at the moment when the silver splash had flattened itself upon the roof beside him. But now he knew that Werder had not perished until a few moments before. What, then, had caused the silvery splash? Had his vengeance gone astray? Had it lighted upon some one else, some innocent person against whom he held no feud? Or had it failed altogether—had his enemy died, not by his hand but by the hand of him who had fired

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the shots from the window beyond the deep chasm of the street?

None of these questions could he answer. But as the hours rolled by and brought no word of another victim who had been mysteriously stricken down, his mind became easier. At least he was sure that he had not killed a stranger.

He did not dare to go back to the roof, to investigate. The police might have guessed something and might be watching to see who would come. His whole deadly device had been planned to obviate any necessity of return. Except for the single silvery splash it would destroy itself and also destroy all trace that it had ever been. There was no reason to suppose that it had not done this. At all events it would be sheer madness for him to go back to investigate.

His device was not complex. On the roof he had fastened a strong wire to a convenient electric-light cable by a "fuse" —a short length of wire of some metal that melted easily, exactly like those in use in all electric plants. The other end he had dropped over the edge of the roof and allowed to dangle against Werder's window.

Gas-jets in the Chimneystack Building were normally lighted by a weak current of electricity derived from a storage battery. In Werder's room he had removed the wire that brought this current and had substituted for it the heavier wire from the roof, which he had drawn in at Werder's window, so arranging it that when Werder tried to light the gas the full strength of the current would pass through his body and kill him instantly. Then the fuse on the roof would be melted by the heat of the current, and the connection would be broken.

The wire, no longer supported, would be drawn over the edge of the roof by its own weight. Lightly held at Werder's end, it would be torn loose and would fall to the street, where it would be picked up and carried away by some one—perhaps by a street-sweeper. As arranged it was impossible that the fuse should be melted and the current discharged until the connection was made in Werder's room; and it seemed impossible that the connection could be made by any one except by Werder himself.

No one, least of all the man who set the snare, could have guessed that a cobra, sent in to torture Werder, would climb upon the dresser and complete the connection that would discharge the current and render the device harmless.

The man who had set the trap knew nothing about the snake. He knew only that the fuse had melted at midnight and that Werder had died many hours later. No wonder the torture of not knowing drove him mad.

For two days he suffered in silence. Then, yesterday, driven by a still greater fear, he went back to the roof. And there he was found, though not by the police. The police were not quite so quick-witted as he had feared. They were not watching for him. But some one else was.

He was not arrested. Whether he will be, depends chiefly on the report of the coroner as to the cause of Werder's death and as to that of the snake found in Werder's rooms. If the snake died from an electric shock and if Werder died from some other cause, all doubt vanishes as to which of the two completed the circuit and thereby brought death upon itself or himself.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Mason awoke for the second time an hour or two later he read his own story, chuckled over it, and told himself that it was darn good stuff. Then he addressed himself to the moment; that is, as somebody once said, "he turned a calm, untroubled mind home, to the instant need of things."

His story, when all was said and done, furnished no solution to what was still the Chimneystack mystery. Particularly it furnished no clue to what he had come to call the "jewels end" of the thing—and that was an end that was hourly bulking larger and larger.

The utter absence in all the papers, even in those that stood closest to Heber and to the existing city administration, of even the smallest reference to robbery as a motive for the crime, seemed to the reporter to be explainable in two ways and in two only: either Heber had been unable to learn anything about the writer of the "jewels" note, or he had found him and was watching him, hoping that with sufficient rope he would hang himself.

Mason was inclined to the second possibility, chiefly because it took only two or

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three men to watch a suspect and two or three score of men to seek for one. A secret known to only two or three might be kept, but not one known to two or three score. Mason did not believe that a general dragnet could be thrown out by the police without at least some of the papers getting wind of it. Theoretically of course, the thing was possible; actually, it couldn't be done.

If Heber had really found his man and was only waiting to pounce upon him, there was no telling how soon he would make the leap. He might make it at any moment—or at least at any moment when he could throw a scoop to his newspaper friends and shut out his newspaper enemies. Hence, haste was necessary if the *Gazette*—and Mason—were to prevent themselves from being beaten.

Mentally Mason kicked himself. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since he had learned the text of the note; and he had learned nothing more.

But he had laid a trap, cunningly interwoven in the text of his story of the morning; and he believed that sooner or later some one would rise to the bait.

It was high time to go on watch. Picking up the telephone that stood on the desk, he called police headquarters, and asked for Perkins, the regular *Gazette* man.

"Hello, Perk!" he said. "This is Mason. Has Heber shown up today?"

"Not yet."

"Good! D'you notice what I said in my story this morning about some alien murderer butting in and killing Werder before—you did? All right. There's a lot more truth than poetry in that. I've got a hunch that there was such a man and that Heber knows about him and is on his track. When he comes in I wish you'd ask him—no, don't ask him yourself; get somebody to ask him for you—ask him what the devil I meant by sticking that in? And watch for an arrest. If he pulls anybody we want to know it. Heber would be only too glad to throw us down if he could. Get me?"

"Sure thing."

"All right, I'll call up later. I'm going to the office now to look at my mail, but I don't know how long I'll be there. S'long."

By "the office" Mason meant the *Gazette* office; and by his mail he meant the Old Cap Collier-Vidocq-Holmes mail, which was sometimes light and sometimes swelled to enormous proportions. Its size was a barometer whose rise and fall registered the changing degree of interest that the great city took in his detective work. Since he had begun on the Werder case it had been swelling swiftly and on this particular morning he guessed it would be overwhelming.

And so indeed he found it.

Nine-tenths of it was, of course, utterly valueless; and ninety-nine hundredths of it was little better. But the hundredth letter might contain a solution or at least a clue to the solution of his problem. He had therefore to examine every letter. The work could not be delegated to any assistant, for no assistant could possess his intimate knowledge of the case and would be able to sort the wheat from the chaff. Furiously he set to work.

He had the whole office to himself. The charwoman had come and gone, and the postman—admitted by the elevator boy—had dumped a sack of mail upon his desk. But in the office itself no one remained. In the morning hours the city rooms of a morning newspaper are usually the loneliest places on earth, made so by contrast with the busy life that beats around them. Not till noon does the force ordinarily begin to trickle in.

This particular morning, however, proved to be an exception, as Mason had half-imagined it might be. Some eager souls, unable to put on paper wild-eyed theories—which might yet serve to solve the deepest mystery—were pretty sure to call to unbosom themselves to the *Gazette's* detective; and Mason had told the elevator boy to show all such in to his desk.

Absorbed in his mail he did not notice that a girl, dressed in black, had entered the huge room, and he did not hear her light hesitating approach. Only when she stopped beside him with a little gasp that might have meant the realization of some incredible hope did he spring to his feet.

THEN he reeled back. White as death, with distended eyes, he gazed into eyes that glowed with joy too great for words.

"You!" he whispered. "You! You! You! I thought you were dead."

Outward the girl flung her hands.

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"And I you," she cried. "I you! I thought I had seen you dead with my own eyes. Oh, Billy! Billy! How did you come back to me from the very grave?"

Step by step Mason moved toward her till at last he reached and took her in his arms.

"Oh! Thank God," he choked. "I heard —such horrible things, such circumstantial things, such——"

"Hush." Like balm the girl's lips clung to his. "They were all true dear, all true. Only by the mercy of God did I escape them. But now they are past and gone forever unless—unless——"

"Unless traitors and cowards bring them to our own land." Mason straightened himself and his eyes flashed. "God!" he cried. "If I could make people see—if I could make them understand——"

"Hush!" Again the girl laid her cool fingers on his lips. "They will understand, Billy. You will help make them understand. I have come to help you bring the facts home to them. You have the ear of the public. You will tell them who and what Werder was——"

"It was Werder then? Ayesha told me——"

"Ayesha? Have you seen Ayesha? Did she escape? I saw her name in the paper, but I could not believe it was really she!"

"Yes! It was she. But you—tell me——"

"I will tell you all; and you will tell the city and the country and the world—now that the world is in the mood to listen. Come! Time flies. Listen and I will tell."

And so, through the long hours of the morning the lovers, reunited when hope had been abandoned—drawn back, both of them, from the very verge of the grave—sat together, talking, talking, talking. When the morning was gone and the reporters began to trickle in for their daily assignments Edith went away and Mason sat down at his machine to type out the story—a story no longer new except in its personal application—of the murder of a nation, the massacre of a people; a murder and a massacre planned, ordered, and directed, not by red Indians nor acknowledged savages, but by a power that terms itself the exponent of culture and refinement.

He wrote it thus:

WERDER'S FOES POLITICAL

VENGEANCE TAKEN FOR ATROCITIES IN FAR-OFF LANDS

His American Victims

The night was moonless, but the blinking stars dimly revealed the village that lay along the road in the gap of the foothills, beyond which the desert rolled for unnumbered leagues. The houses, one and all, were dark and silent; barred as if to shut out the moaning that had risen around them the whole night long. Early in the evening, just after the sun had set and the velvety tropic night had come with a rush, the moaning had been drowned by more sinister sounds—by the shrieks of young girls and the mad protests of older women, and now and then by the last helpless ravings of a man taking toll of those who had led him and his to death. But later on this had died down and only the moaning had continued.

Incessantly, high above, the great stars rolled along their ways, blinking down on the devil's work below. They were very old stars and they had seen much of such work in their times. Human misery was an old tale to them. Not once but many times in the past five thousand years had they seen the same scenes, the same anguish, the same destruction to the innocent crying out to the inexorable skies. Silent, unheeding, they rolled on their course, while from a thousand camps went up the wailing of a million human beings.

So the night passed on till, far in the east, a gray streak showed where the dawn came hesitant, unwilling to reveal the horrors that the night had hidden.

Slowly the light grew. First it picked out the silent houses; then it illumined the multitude that, shelterless, bedless, foodless, had lain all night stretched on the bare ground. A trumpet blew and from here men in ragged uniforms roused themselves and straggled toward the spot whence it had sounded. The rest of the victims—or prisoners, call them what you will—scarcely stirred. Those who moved at all merely sat up and stared hopelessly at the coming day. Some few—mothers these—struggled to their feet and staggered to the spots where the soldiers had camped. Some of them came back later, supporting

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a daughter; others dropped down and began to wail vainly above their dead.

The sun rose higher. The soldiers sat down and began to munch their meager meal. The prisoners, stirred by the sight of food, clambered to their feet and gathered in, in, in; until they stood, like hungry dogs about their masters' tables, hoping that at the end some crums might come to them.

Their staring seemed to trouble the soldiers. Abruptly an officer sprang to his feet and barked an order; the soldiers snatched up their rifles and, like popping firecrackers, their gunfire rattled forth. Here a woman fell, there an old man, yonder a child, till the crowd broke and fled in terror. Then officer and men resumed their meal, leaving the dead where they had fallen and the wounded where they could crawl.

Soon the trumpet called once more. The soldiers formed in line, received orders, and broke up into squads that moved to appointed places and began to herd the prisoners into line.

Swift protest followed. The women—not young women, for these were nearly all dead, but women ill-favored and past the prime of life—began to clamor.

"Are we to have no bread?" they raved.

The answer came in spattering bullets that slew and spared not.

Soon the outcry ceased and the survivors, forming in line, stumbled slowly down the pass, toward the end of the foothills and the beginning of the desert.

Some few stayed behind—here a mother with a child that could not walk and that she was no longer strong enough to carry, as she had during the earlier days of the march; there some one who had given up the unequal fight with the death that had come to seem inevitable; yonder one of the wounded, who could not walk. With none of these did the soldiers stop to argue; a bayonet thrust was quicker and ended all.

Last of all waited the officer with a dozen men and half a dozen horses. At the end he gave an order and a soldier opened the door of one of the village houses and beckoned forth its inmates.

These were five in number. Two of them, a man and a girl, appeared from their clothes and their faces to be Americans. The other three—all girls—were Armenians.

The Armenian girls were sick with horror; desperately they clung to the Americans, with pathetic confidence in their power to save.

Coolly the officer surveyed them. Then he bowed to the American girl.

"It is time to start, mademoiselle," he said, in excellent French. "Be pleased to mount. You, also, monsieur!" he bowed to the American man.

The girl glanced swiftly at the three Armenians.

"Pardon, Hassan Bey," she said. "But one of the girls who was with us last night has disappeared. I can not go on without her."

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry," he said. "Mademoiselle should keep better watch over her attendants. Girls will be girls, mademoiselle. They have a strong affection for soldiers and—what would you, mademoiselle?"

"Affection? She was torn away by force. She——"

"I know nothing of that, mademoiselle. Be pleased to mount."

Again he indicated the horses.

The American girl turned to her male companion.

"What shall we do, Billy," she asked, despairingly. "We can't leave Marye. I promised her mother——"

A shrill scream interrupted. The three Armenian girls had been snatched by soldiers from behind the two Americans and, desperately but vainly struggling, were being rushed down the dusty road, after the column of prisoners.

The American girl sprang forward, calling to them!

"Ayesha! Vana!" she screamed. "Josepha! Oh! My God! Billy! Don't let them——"

But the American man needed no urging. Already he had started after the girls.

But it is only in novels that one unarmed man can overcome a dozen soldiers. Almost instantly he was thrown back by a wall of crossed bayonets.

Furiously he swung on the Turkish officer.

"Bring those girls back instantly!" he raged. "Instantly, I say; or I'll have you hanged. I know your Sultan and your general. And they know me. I know your German masters, too; and I know they do not know the devil's work that is going on here. I didn't know it until last

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night. But I'll tell them and they will end it and you. But I'll see that it ends here now, or I'll make the world flame with the tale of its horrors. Bring those girls back! Quick!"

Caressingly the officer fingered his mustache.

"Monsieur, I believe, is a reporter on a newspaper published in America, is he not?" he asked. "Monsieur has been traveling with the German armies—yes? Monsieur was refused permission to come to Armenia—and he chose to come without permission. You see, monsieur, I have received information—and orders. Those swine—" he pointed to the slowly-moving column—"those swine are going to the desert. They will never come back.

"The Germans—plainly monsieur does not know that the Armenians are being evacuated at the request of the Germans. Monsieur was to have accompanied them—and he was not to have come back. The American papers—and the Sultan, on whom be peace—would have lamented the zeal that cost him his life. But now that monsieur wishes to hang me I shall take a quicker way."

He stepped back.

"Strike!" he ordered in Turkish.

The American had no time to guard. Pat at the word, a soldier, standing behind him, struck, driving a bayonet clear through his body; and without a cry he crashed forward upon his face.

Edith did not cry out. Stunned into silence she gazed at the body of her countryman with eyes that grew until they seemed to fill all her face.

"Dead!" she breathed. "Dead! Oh! Billy! Billy! Dead!"

At last she looked at the Turkish officer. He was watching her smilingly.

"Be pleased to note, Mademoiselle," he observed, silkily, "that your friend attacked me and that my orderly was compelled to kill him in order to protect me."

White as death, but undaunted, Edith faced him. The blood of *Mayflower* pilgrims and of Virginia cavaliers mingled in her veins.

"Better kill me too," she grated. "I take up the fight where my friend has dropped it. Better kill me too."

But Hassan laughed.

"We do not kill young and pretty women in Turkey," he observed, "at least, not immediately." Then suddenly his face darkened into a snarl of rage. "Bah!" he snarled. "You are a fool. A day's tramp with the procession of the condemned will teach you much. Go! Join them. Tonight you will kneel to me for the protection of my tent. Go! I say."

He pointed to the dusty road, already shimmering in the red rays of the mounting sun, fit promise of the blaze that waited in the desert.

Obedient to his sign two soldiers sprang forward to clutch the girl. But as their hands touched her she played her last card.

"Take care!" she shrilled. "I sent word by a sure hand to the German consul last night—word that will bring him instantly on my track; and if harm comes to me he will see that you pay, pay, pay!"

The Turk hesitated. Edith's words were disquieting. Then:

"I think you are lying," he said, conversationally. "But I have no wish to interfere with the—er—designs of my friends, the Germans. They are too nearly akin to us Turks in spirit. So I will wait till tonight. If Herr Lilienkranz reaches us by then he will find you a little weary perhaps—but uninjured. If he does not reach us——"

A shrug completed the sentence. Again he signed to the soldiers.

But Edith pointed to a cloud of dust that was rising far up the pass.

"He comes now," she panted.

Her words were a mere guess, with no real foundation except hope. But they proved true. Swiftly the dust came nearer and from it emerged an automobile, furiously driven. Straight up to the group it came and from it stepped a huge blond man, strong and heavy, with the high cheekbones and broad face of the Prussian. Forward he strode with the air of one used to command.

"What does this mean, Hassan Bey?" he demanded, angrily. "Why have you detained this high well-geborn lady?"

Hassan Bey clicked his heels together and threw up his hand in salute.

"Your pardon, Herr Consul," he said. "I did not detain the lady. She insisted on coming with us. She claimed she wished to protect the women whose traitorous rebellion against our mighty Sultan—on whose name be peace—compelled him to order their removal. Apparently she distrusted our good faith."

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The frown on the consul's face did not lessen, but he turned to Edith questioningly.

"Is this true, Fräulein?" he asked.

"It is not true." Edith was choking with the sudden revulsion of feeling; scarcely could she speak. "It is not true. I was carried off with the girls from the American mission. I have been kept a prisoner. A friend, an American newspaper-man, who followed to save me, came last night, and but now was murdered in cold blood at my very feet. Others too were murdered!

"Look about you and see their bodies; all the night long I heard the murderers at work. The girls I tried to protect were forced away and are being driven into the desert to death and worse than death. And this man dared to say that this was being done by the desire and with the consent of your German emperor."

Fury, real or pretended, convulsed the consul's features. 'Round he swung upon the Turkish officer. If his eye quivered, negativing the purport of his words, Edith did not see it.

"Dog," he barked. "Send orders at once to halt the prisoners till instructions for their disposal can be obtained. Order the girls who were with this lady to be brought back instantly."

"*Zu befehl*, Herr Consul."

Hassan Bey beckoned to an orderly and gave him swift orders and watched the man speed away on the trail of the vanished procession.

Lilienkranz ignored him and his action. Plainly he took obedience for granted. Gravely he turned to Edith.

"I regret that you should have suffered so, Fräulein," he said. "I came as quickly as I could. I grieve that I was too late to save this chivalrous gentleman—" he pointed at the body of the newspaper correspondent—"and these other poor people. I shall inform my gracious emperor of what these dogs of Turks are doing; and it will be stopped."

"I thank you."

Reaction had come upon Edith and she tottered where she stood.

The consul caught her and lifted her into his car.

"Rest here till your girls come, Fräulein," he directed.

Edith opened her mouth, but no words came. The brilliant day was growing dark about her. Faintly she heard the consul's voice assuring her that the American correspondent should have decent burial. Then blackness, utter and all pervading, wrapped her 'round.

Hours later, it seemed, she opened her eyes and found herself in bed, beneath a roof. For a moment she lay motionless, staring wonderingly at the unfamiliar walls. Then, abruptly, memory returned and she sat up.

"Billy!" she called. "Ayesha! Josepha!"

"Yes! Yes! Miss Edith! Ayesha's here." A girl—one of the three who had been with her—ran to the bed. "I am here!"

Wildly Edith's eyes quested the room.

"Vana," she cried. "Where is Vana?"

The girls' eyes clouded and they looked at each other hesitantly.

"Vana ain't here," answered Ayesha at last.

Ayesha, though an Armenian born, had spent much of her life in America.

"Why not? Where is she? I promised her mother to bring her back safely. Where is she? Wasn't she with you?"

"Yes! Miss Edith. But she fought so hard that one of the men hit her; and the soldiers said she was too ugly to bring—that the consul didn't like ugly girls."

Edith laughed wildly.

"Oh! What beasts! What beasts they are! To think—to think—oh! I must see Herr Lilienkranz at once."

Desperately she sprang from the bed and rushed toward the chair on which her clothes were hung, and began to dress.

"I must see him at once," she panted. "He will send after Vana. It will be easy to find her now that the procession is halted."

Ayesha and Josepha looked at each other.

"But the procession is not halted," they exclaimed together.

"Some mistake!" Edith returned impatiently. "I heard the orders given."

Swiftly, aided by the two girls, she completed her attirement and hurried from the room.

Down the stairs she ran. In the lower hall an open doorway let out a flood of light that argued spaciousness and in through it she sped.

She had guessed rightly. Within the room the consul sat at his desk.

When he saw her he jumped up.

"Come in! Come in, Fräulein," he cried.

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"Come in! I am glad to see you restored. Will you not sit?"

He pushed forward a chair.

Edith sat down. She found herself weaker than she had supposed. Then she poured forth her plea for Vana.

Lilienkranz nodded.

"But surely!" he acceded. "I will send at once. Pardon me for a moment."

He left the room.

Soon he was back.

"I have sent," he asserted. "The girl shall be with you tonight. The other two have relatives near here, have they not? Good! I think I have found them. They will be here soon; and if they are the right ones I shall be glad. If there is anything else I can do, Fräulein——"

Edith's eyes grew humid.

"Only to help these poor people all you can; and I know you will do that without asking. And—and—I wrote to you about some jewels——"

"Ah! Yes! I had almost forgotten. The jewels from the cathedral that you saved from the Turkish looters. It was a brave deed, Fräulein; worthy of one of your great nation."

"It was easy to save them. It was chiefly by chance that I managed it. But I fear for their safety. Any day I may be killed and then——"

Edith paused expressively.

"Then they will be lost. Quite right, Fräulein. I know but one place where they will be safe, and that is in the custody of his Germanic Majesty at Constantinople. You have hidden them well?"

Edith shook her head.

"No," she said, a little breathlessly. "They are not well hidden. I had no chance or time to pick and choose a place. But any place seemed safer than on my person. So I hid them. And I told no one, not even my girls. If you will get them——"

"Willingly, Fräulein, if you will tell me where they are. I will go the moment that the car can be brought around."

So Edith told him. Luckily or unluckily she did not read the gleam in his eye. In fact, she had little chance to do so, for at that moment a servant came in with coffee; and she drank a cup gratefully.

Then, with ears filled with the consul's assurances that the jewels should be rescued and kept safely, she went slowly up the stairs.

Something, perhaps the reaction from all she had gone through, was bearing down upon her. Slowly and sluggishly she moved. Only by a desperate effort did she reach her room.

Once there she sank down upon the bed and tried to rally her faculties.

"Vana will come soon," she stammered to the girls. "Your—your friends have been found. They are coming. We—" a dreadful yawn distorted her face—"oh, I am so sleepy."

Like a log she dropped down upon the pillow. An instant later she was asleep.

It was long before she waked. When she did, the low western sun was streaming into her windows.

Ayesha and Josepha had disappeared. At her call an old German woman came and explained that both of them had gone.

"They found their friends," she said; "and went away with them. Greatly they longed to say farewell to the *gnadige* lady; but she slept, and the doctor says that she must not be awakened. Their friends could not wait; and so, at last, they go with them. They leave much love for the gracious Fräulein."

Edith dropped back into her chair with wrinkled brows. Of course, she told herself, she was glad that Josepha and Ayesha had found their friends. Not for the world would she have had it otherwise. But she could not help feeling grieved that they should have left her alone, even under the protection of the consul, and that they should have left her without a spoken farewell.

No doubt, however, they had acted for the best. Dully she turned to the old woman. But the woman knew nothing.

"I did not see their friends," she explained. "But they seemed very happy at finding them. The high well-geborn consul will know. He has on a journey gone, but soon will return back. Meanwhile I am the servant of the gracious lady. She will wish to bathe—yes? And to put on the fresh clothes? I had the bath prepared early. But the Herr doctor say 'No! Let her sleep,' and I obey. But now——"

Volubly she chattered on.

Edith did not ask where the consul had gone; her brain was still dulled, but she thought that she could guess his destination very easily. He had gone for the jewels;

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when he came back he would arrange to send her and them on to the ambassador at Constantinople, and the ambassador would send her home and would keep the jewels till better times should come, and the Cross should be once more upreared in the land where now the Crescent ruled supreme. Edith had not learned the full workings of *Kultur*. But her final enlightenment was at hand.

Almost happily she went to the bath; and, lapped in its purely animal comfort, she forgot for the moment the horrors of the last week and even the crowning horror of the morning. Human nature can stand just so much. Once it has passed its limit, it disregards further ills. Edith's had passed the limit; she could feel no more without going mad. Almost she forgot the American reporter—almost, but not quite.

The fact that the fresh clothing that she was given when she left the bath was Turkish did not trouble her. Often before, during her work with the American mission, she had found it advantageous to wear the veil.

Once she was back in her room, she sought through her belongings—pitifully few they were—for the minor toilet appurtenances that she needed. And in this search she found a letter.

It was a very short letter, hastily scrawled by a little accustomed hand:

BELOVED TEACHER:

They are coming to take us to some people they say are our friends. But we're dead scared! You sleep so deep and you won't wake up. I believe you are doped. I don't believe it is our friends. I don't trust that German consul. Everybody says it is the Germans who order the Turks to kill us. And I'm scared! Good-by.

AYESHA.

Twice Edith read it, first with bewilderment, then with doubt, lastly with fear. Try as she might she could not quite dismiss Ayesha's words as mere silly terror. Reinvigorated by the bath she had recovered the power to think and with it the power to remember—and to fear. Could she, after all, have been tricked? No! No! It was unbelievable!

But her doubts, once raised, would not down. Nervously she began to pace the room. What should she do? What could she do? She was only a girl, far from home and friends, with not even a weapon to kill herself, if need be. What should she do?

A low boom, as of far-off cannon, followed by a clamor in the house below, interrupted the current of her thoughts. Quickly she hurried to the door.

Below stairs the clamor increased swiftly. Then, abruptly, it died away with a rush of flying feet.

The stillness that followed frightened her. But she was ever one to meet danger halfway. To the top of the stairs she went and looked down to the hall below. Apparently it was deserted. Hesitantly she descended; and hesitantly she went to the office where she had once found the consul. But he was not there; and with growing fear she went to the back door and looked into the court. It too was deserted. Terrified now, she crossed the court to the houses on the other side.

And there she found Josepha and Ayesha.

Josepha was dead—mercifully. Ayesha still lived, but her moments seemed few.

"Run! Run! Miss Edith," she gasped. "The consul will come back soon. He gave us to the soldiers and he say that tonight—tonight—oh! Miss Edith! Run! Run while you can."

The girl's voice died away. She closed her eyes and lay very still.

Edith knew the truth now, knew to what fate she had been betrayed, knew that she had been spared only because of the jewels and that with their finding her reprieve would end.

Back to the house she staggered. Flight was her only hope; but chance of flight by the back she knew there was none. She must escape by the front or not at all. Through the hall she hurried and to the great door. It stood ajar and her hope began to mount. Then came the sound of hurrying feet without. Barely she had time to slip into the consul's office and to crouch behind a screen when the door banged back and Lilienkranz strode in. For a moment he stood, gazing about, then he dropped a packet that he carried upon the desk and hurried back to the door and began to roar for servants, soldiers, attendants.

For a time no one came. Then the old woman who had attended Edith hurried in, rubbing her rheumy eyes.

"Pardon! Pardon!" she chattered. "The high-born Herr Consul will pardon? I did but sleep for a moment. I——"

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"Where are the others? Where is the American girl?"

The consul's voice, shot with frenzy, filled the room.

"The others? I know not. The American girl—she waits the Herr Consul in the bridal chamber, according to the noble consul's orders, attired as a bride should be. Since he went away she has not ceased to cry out for him. She is eaten up with longing for her lord's return."

An evil light came into the consul's eyes. For a moment he hesitated. Then:

"Go!" he ordered. "Leave the house. The Russians are coming. They will be here soon. Save yourself."

The old woman squealed in terror. Then—

"And the Herr Consul?" she questioned.

"I stay. My bride is waiting for me. I will not disappoint her. Go!"

The old woman went, hurrying away on tottering feet. The consul turned to the table and snatched up the packet he had flung there.

"There is time," he muttered. "There is time. And she must die or the jewels will not be safe."

Out of the room he rushed.

Instantly Edith scrambled to her feet.

No time was there for her to falter; escape hung on the turn of a hair.

"Help! Help! Oh, God! Help!" she gasped, as she rose. "Help! Help!" she repeated as she staggered to the door, swaying from side to side as she went. "Help! Help!" she breathed as, unmolested, protected by her Turkish robes, she passed down the street, hearing from the house behind her a bellow of rage, whose meaning she needed no one to tell.

Ten minutes later a regiment of Russian cavalry, raiding far ahead of the main army, swept through the town. When it was gone—gone as speedily as it had come—Edith had lost herself in the city.

Three months later Lilienkranz, erstwhile consul, now calling himself Werder, had landed in New York, bearing with him the priceless jewels torn from the shrine of his Redeemer—jewels whose enormous value his cupidity had been powerless to resist. Close on his trail came the avengers—the representatives of the legion whose friends and families he should have saved but whom he had instead betrayed to long horrors and to ultimate death.

Close behind him, too, followed the executioners sent by the Government whose fiendish orders he had carried out—executioners who had instructions to bring back the jewels and to punish him who had dared divert his imperial master's loot. Last of all came Edith, intent on recovering the jewels and on restoring them in happier days to their place in the rerisen shrine of God.

CHAPTER X

WITH a final *click* Mason finished his story. As he jerked the last page from the whirring platen he looked up and saw that he sat almost alone. During the hours that he had been working he had been vaguely conscious that men were coming and going about him, but, absorbed in his story, he had paid no attention to them, and they had respected his evident desire not to be interrupted. One by one they had secured their assignments and had gone, leaving only one or two cubs to run on emergency calls.

Mason leaned back in his chair and stretched his cramped muscles. Then he gathered together the pages on which he had typed out the story and walked with them into the city editor's den. Hibbs, however, was not there; and Mason "spiked" his story on an iron hook and left the room and the building.

An hour later he returned, sat down at his machine and once more began to type furiously:

THE JEWELS

"Somewhere in London" stands an unpretentious stone building in which is housed the headquarters of the British intelligence service. In it centers the far-flung web whose mesh envelopes the whole earth. To it from the remotest isles of the seven seas and from the practically more remote capitals of the Germanic Powers comes day after day through a thousand channels from a million sources a never-ceasing flow of information. Bit by bit the items come. Taken alone each may be valueless or nearly so; taken together they forge the ever-tightening commercial and economic chain that in good time will throttle the blond beast that leaped upon the inoffensive world.

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Britain was slow to embark upon this work. Like America she did not take kindly to spying. But, once forced into it to meet the all-pervasive system built by Germany during years of treacherous peace she far outstripped her teacher. At headquarters she has collected and collated a vast card-index, holding information on nearly every man in the world and on nearly everything that he has done in the last three years.

Thousands of the stories are complete, rounded out, requiring no further elucidation, even though to many of them finis has not yet been written. Tens of thousands of them are still imperfect, though day by day they are being perfected. Millions more are inchoate, confused, baffling, waiting for the key that, like the master drop in the chemist's solution, will precipitate the ingredients and make all clear.

To this office came Edith, a year after her escape from the clutch of the German consul in far-away Armenia. To tell by what long-continued paths of suffering and terror she had reached it would fill a book by itself. Suffice it to say that she had at last reached London and friends.

But she had not reached it in health and strength. Weeks went by without her being able to recall her own name and home. Later, grown stronger, she told her story to be added to the long record of horrors that for centuries will be associated with *Kultur* and with Armenia. Of the jewels she spoke but briefly, considering them lost forever.

But the cards of the intelligence office carried a jewel story to which hers was a supplement—the story of a German consul, who had been dispatched by the emperor himself to supervise and direct the "evacuation" by the Mohammedans of the Christian Armenians from their homes. This consul, who had won high praise by the thoroughness with which he had acquitted himself of his task, who had even been ranked with the man who sank the *Lusitania*, had suddenly vanished. That he had done so by his own will appeared certain from the fact that the emperor had offered a great reward for him—alive or dead.

The cards also chronicled the destruction of the great Armenian cathedral and the disappearance of its priceless jewels, but they contained no note that these jewels had ever reached the hands of the Crown Prince, for whom they were reported to have been destined.

Edith's story bound these supposedly unrelated facts into a continuous whole, so plain that a child could read it. The consul had stolen the jewels and fled with them.

He must be found. America was practically the only place of refuge open to him in the war-circumscribed world; and to America the search was directed.

Ultimately a man supposed to be he was found; and Edith was promptly shipped across the water to see and if possible to identify him.

With the placing of her foot upon her native soil Edith's memory returned. She knew who she was and where she had lived. But she did not go to her friends nor even send them word. Though every fiber of her body, every wish of her heart impelled her thereto, duty forbade.

They thought her dead; to notify them at once would hasten the salving of an old wound; but it might—through the newspapers—warn the former consul that the avengers were on his track. So, without a word to tell that she had risen from the dead, Edith went, with those who awaited her, to the Chimneystack Building, where she promptly identified Otto Werder as the missing German consul.

Delay followed. Werder might have been arrested at once. But to arrest him would not necessarily be to recover the jewels. He could not possibly escape; the web had enveloped him too completely; at any time it could be drawn tight. It was best, therefore, to watch him for a while and see whether he might not betray, or whether he could be forced to betray, the hiding-place of the jewels.

There were, however, difficulties about this. Werder had been found and pointed out by Armenians living in New York. The eye of hate is keen; and the Armenians owed a bitter debt to Consul Lilienkranz. Day by day, week by week, their longing for vengeance had grown, as, bit by bit, the tale of the infamies he had perpetrated on their helpless kindred had drifted in. When they learned from London that he was supposed to be in America and very possibly in New York they joined upon his trail with the deadly persistency of sleuth-hounds.

When he was found and identified as Otto Werder most of them waited for the law to act.

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But not all of them. Many knew only too well that America had not yet learned the bitter lesson that leniency is considered by the Prussians a sign of weakness or of fear—a subject fit only for derision. Many knew that American law could and would take no note of crimes committed in far-away Armenia. At most it would intern; and internment was too light a punishment to satisfy those whose kindred had perished at Werder's hands.

The law might also give back the jewels—in time; but no recovered jewels could pay for the innocent blood. So, though most of those who knew of Werder's presence held off and waited for the law, a few moved instantly to wreak private vengeance.

One of these would-be avengers was Ayesha, the snake-charmer, who, surviving her terrible experience, had, like Edith, succeeded in getting back to America, where she had resumed her stage work—the work she had given up in order to follow Edith to the land of her infancy to help in the evangelization of her own people. Bankrupt of faith in the justice and mercy of God, she had done what she could to take vengeance. But she had not killed—for Werder had not died by the bite of a snake.

Another would-be avenger was he who had wired the electric-light cable into Werder's room, only to have his device brought to naught by the interposition of Ayesha's cobra. He, like Ayesha, had not killed—for Werder had not died from an electric shock.

A third avenger, disguised as a postman, gained access to Russell Conway's rooms by delivering to him a letter saying that it was Werder who had murdered his childhood friend and life-long companion and sister-in-law-to-be in far-away Armenia—a letter that was certain to drive and did drive him from his rooms to Werder's. Conway's letter about the Dakota ranch came later that same day; and Conway took advantage of its arrival to prevaricate in the hope of saving his women-folks from publicity.

Who was this third avenger? The question can not be answered yet; at present he is X, the unknown quantity in the equation. Very soon, in a few hours perhaps, his identity will be known and the equation will be solved.

Already the coils are tightening about him.

One-Armed Sweeny—which, by the way, is not his real name—has been known to the New York police for years as a real *Jimmie Valentine*, a man of such marvelous perspicacity and refinement of touch that no hiding-place can elude him and no strong-box can defy him. Physically weak, one-armed, almost timid, abhorring violence, he was for years charged with at least one-half the city's annual burglaries. Of how many of them he was really guilty can not be said. Certainly he was never convicted, though often arrested and often tried.

Four years ago One-Armed Sweeny was converted by Edith Conway. He notified the police that he was through with crime and that thenceforth he meant to go straight.

Some of the police did not believe him; others held old grudges against him; still others—young men mostly—thought they would win reputation by convicting the man whom older officers had failed to lay by the heels. So for a time Sweeny paid the penalty of his reputation by being subjected to repeated arrest; finally, however, he was let alone.

But the memory of his skill persisted, and when the Government emissaries wished to search Werder's rooms for the jewels without leaving any trace of their visit they called on Sweeny to do the work.

Sweeny refused. He thought the invitation was a police trap. But when Edith seconded the request he consented.

On the night before Werder was killed he took advantage of the latter's absence—with Conway—and entered his rooms in the Chimneystack Building, and began to search them. He did his work by means of an electric torch and did not touch the gas bracket. If he had touched it, he and not the cobra would have caused the fuse on the roof to melt and fall in a silvery splash.

Almost at the last, after he had searched the rooms from end to end without result, he found upon the floor a sheet of paper on which he read the typewritten words:

Jewels will be seized tomorrow. Better get them to safety.

Long he puzzled over this message. Its wording seemed to show that the jewels were still in Werder's possession, or, at least, that the writer of the note supposed that they were. But did it show anything more?

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Did it show, for instance, that the jewels had been in the apartment and that Werder had just carried them away? Or did it show that the jewels were elsewhere and that Werder had gone to bring them home?

Sweeny did not know. But he determined to wait till Werder came home and resolve possibility into fact; and, if necessary, to possess himself of them forcibly. Into the rear room he went, pulled a chair into a favorable position for looking into the front room—when the gas should be lighted—and sat down to wait, holding the typed message in his hand.

He waited a long time—so long that he became uneasy. According to such hastily acquired information as he had been able to obtain, Werder kept very regular hours and should have been home early. That he had not come might mean something or nothing. On the whole, Sweeny felt hopeful that it might mean that he was fetching the jewels.

Once only was his vigil interrupted. At a very late hour, just when he was beginning to fear that Werder might not mean to return at all that night a sudden *plop* from the direction of the dresser by the window made him jump. The sound, however, was not repeated; and, as a flash from his electric torch showed him no possible cause for it, he soon settled back to wait. He could not guess, of course, that at the same instant the watcher on the roof was registering his finger-print on the hot metal of the silvery splash formed by the melting of the fuse.

All things end at last, however. Just when Sweeny was about to despair Werder came home.

He was drunk, too drunk to search the rooms for a possible intruder, or to find one if he did look for him. Staggeringly he made his way to the dresser and pulled at the rod of the gas-fixture. It did not light, and finally he used a match. Then he made his way to the center-table and flung a package upon it. Lastly he dropped into a near-by chair.

Sweeny was about to join him when he saw the outer door again open and another man peer in and then swiftly enter, close the door behind him, and turn the key in the lock. Then, watched by the ex-cracksman, he deliberately masked himself.

But not before Sweeny had seen and recognized his face.

Then he came forward, and shook the drunken man repeatedly by the shoulder.

Suddenly he ceased. His frame became rigid, and through the holes in his mask he glared at the package on the table—the package which, though he did not know it, Werder had taken from the bank hours before and had left in Conway's safe while he had been busy in painting the town red.

Not long did the intruder hesitate. Swiftly he stepped to the window and pulled the blind down to the very bottom. Then, returning to the table, he tore open the package with trembling fingers.

From it there tumbled a burst of gems and jewels that might well have stirred a blind man to vision. Diamonds, rubies, emeralds, all the centuries-old accumulation of a great cathedral, mingled in a pile that coruscated like living fire.

Sweeny's fingers itched as he watched. Never had he seen wealth like this within arm's reach. Haltingly, as if in spite of his will, his fingers fastened on the pistol he carried. A single shot—a single shot—and . . . .

His hand fell away and he straightened up. He would not do it. He had entered upon the straight and narrow way and he intended to follow it to the end.

The intruder had finished his search by now and was beginning to stuff the jewels into his own pockets.

Irresolutely Sweeny watched him. The stones he had come to get were being carried off before his very eyes; and he could not decide what to do. He was well acquainted with the man who was taking them; he had known him for years and had never suspected him of crookedness. He could not believe that he had come to steal. Rather he believed that the intruder, like himself, was an emissary of the Government, sent to recover the jewels.

Sweeny had been told some, though not all, of the history of these jewels and of the efforts that were being made to recover them. He hesitated to interfere; if he made a mistake his past repute might damn him, despite the testimony of Edith and her friends. Besides, he was not a fighting man; his crimes had been those of skill, not of violence.

While he hesitated, the moments slipped away until at last, with bulging pockets, the intruder slipped suddenly to the door and vanished.

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Then Sweeny came out of his trance and followed.

Very quickly he overtook the other and began to dog his footsteps. Block after block he followed. But he was not a "trailer" nor a "shadow"; probably he did his following awkwardly. Certainly he betrayed himself, for as he rounded a corner in eager pursuit his quarry turned and sprang upon him with a shower of furious blows. Under the assault the night around him grew even blacker; street lamps and stars winked out together; and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XI

MASON stopped his typing and looked up. The western sun was very low and darkness was falling fast. Gathering up his papers, he went into the city editor's den and sat down.

"Hibbs," he said. "Werder was robbed the night before he was killed. You've read that story I left on your desk today and you know he had a lot of jewels that had belonged to the Armenian cathedral. I don't know where he had been keeping them, but somebody got on their track and wrote him a letter that induced him to bring them to his rooms the night before he was killed. Then somebody went there and stole them.

"I'm going to try to recover them tonight. I've written as much of the story as I can and I'm going out to get more. Meanwhile, I wish you'd have the stuff set and send a proof on to me at police headquarters. I'll probably have to change the story more or less after I catch the man—if he doesn't catch me instead; but I need the proof of the story as it stands to help me catch him."

Hibbs whistled softly.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "That sounds like a mouthful. "Want any help?"

Mason shook his head.

"Not at present," he said.

"Well! Call on me if you do. If there's going to be a muss I'd like to be in on it. I'm not on the shelf yet, even if the old man has made me an editor. Um! How about that other story of yours—the one you left on my desk this afternoon? It's all set."

"Run it tomorrow morning. This story—" Mason patted the sheets in his hand—"this story I may have to hold till tomorrow night. I'm not sure yet. Now listen carefully, old man, and do just as I ask. It's important,—— important!"

"Sure. But——"

"This second story speaks of the British intelligence office having directed the pursuit of Werder—which, incidentally, means the pursuit of the man who killed Werder. I had to write it that way. As a matter of fact, most of the references should be to both the British intelligence and to our own Secret Service; but if I had brought in our men the story would scare the murderer too much.

"I want to leave him hope for escape. Later, if I can't do it, I want you to edit our men into the proof. For the rest, I've written a key to the story with the name of the thief and some other things. Here it is." Mason held out a sealed envelop. "Open this at twelve o'clock tonight precisely and do exactly as it directs—or you'll probably never see me alive again."

"Eh! Oh! I say, Billy——"

"At twelve precisely. Send the proofs of this story to me at police headquarters the minute they're ready. I'll be there till I've had a little matter out with Heber. After that I'll be—God knows where!"

Two hours later Mason sat in the press-room at police headquarters poring over a proof of his story that had just been brought to him by a messenger from the office. Just as he finished reading it he was called to the telephone.

"Heber's just left home, Billy," said a soft, feminine voice over the wire. "He's probably on his way to headquarters."

Mason nodded.

"Good!" he said. "I'm waiting for him. I'll call you up for another report the minute I see him coming in at the door—in about twenty minutes, I guess."

"I'll be here," promised the voice. "But, oh, Billy. Do be careful. If anything should happen to you now I should die."

Mason laughed.

"Care's my middle name," he said.

"It wasn't that morning in Armenia," retorted the voice. "But I suppose the end was inevitable—then. But here and now——"

"Here and now nothing's going to happen. You'll see."

Twenty minutes later to the dot Heber entered the door and Mason went to the

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telephone. When he left it he was smiling. Up to Heber he went.

"Say! Heber!" he said. "I've got a hunch on that Werder case; and I want to consult with you about it."

Heber glared at the reporter.

"The —— you do!" he rasped.

"Yes! I do! Oh! I know you don't like me; and I'm free to admit that I don't care for you any too much. Still, I'm grateful to you for one thing."

"What's that?" Heber's tones were decidedly suspicious.

"That is precisely what I want to talk to you about. But it'll take some time. It involves a jewel robbery and a letter that you found on Werder's floor the day he was killed. Come into the press-room and we can talk it out. The room's almost deserted now."

The detective's eyes had narrowed to pinpoints.

"So you know what was in that letter, do you?" he grated. "I might have guessed it. All right! I'll come talk with you. But I want to warn you that you're under arrest right now for complicity in Werder's murder and that anything you say will be used against you."

"Eh? Oh! Yes!" The reporter gasped, then grinned. "Bravo, Heber," he exclaimed. "I didn't know you had it in you. But come along and let's have this thing out!"

The press-room—sacred to representatives of the press—was not almost but quite deserted, the regular men having all rushed away to a near-by fire. Mason knew, however, that they would be back very soon, or that substitutes from their respective papers would arrive to cover headquarters during their absence. So he lost no time.

"First, read this," he directed, handing the proof of the One-Armed Sweeny story across the table.

Heber took it hesitantly.

"What paper's this from?" he demanded; "from the *Gazette?*"

Mason shrugged his shoulders.

"It isn't from any paper yet," he responded. "It'll be from the *Gazette* tomorrow if——"

He paused significantly. Then—

"Read it," he repeated, sharply.

Heber read it. When he had finished he looked up.

"Well?" he queried.

"Well! We've found Sweeny and got his story. He told us the name of the man who stole the jewels and knocked him down. Sweeny isn't very courageous and he isn't very vindictive. But even a worm will turn if you tread on it."

"It won't if you tread on it hard enough," returned the detective savagely.

"Eh? Well, no! That's true. But this fellow didn't tread on Sweeny hard enough. That's the point. Sweeny revived and told us who he was. Can you guess his name, Heber?"

The detective did not answer directly.

"You said you wanted to consult me?" he insisted.

"I did. I want those jewels. You've got them, Heber, and I believe you've got them here, in the police station. Come across with them."

The detective did not move. Steadily he faced the reporter.

"And you think I'm going to give them up to you?" he questioned, derisively.

"I think so—yes. I've got you dead to rights, Heber."

"Humph! I guess you're forgetting you're under arrest right now for murdering Werder. When I put you in a cell no spite charges that you and a —— thief like Sweeny can cook up are going to bother me."

Mason sighed.

"Maybe not," he admitted. "Well, if you want a show-down, you'll have to have it. That story—" he indicated the proof on the table—"that story will go to press at twelve o'clock unless I stop it. Before it goes it'll have your name inserted as the man whom Sweeny saw. Moreover—" Mason went on—"it will have your name as that of the man who killed Werder from Conway's window."

"What?"

The detective leaped to his feet and clapped his hand to his pistol. Then he laughed and sat down again.

"Give us a better one," he jeered.

"I don't need to. I know you robbed Werder and killed him to keep him from making trouble. And I know how you killed him. Moreover, the coroner knows too and has known for twenty-four hours. He's been keeping quiet in the hope of finding the murderer. And now I've found him. Conway and the elevator boy in the Electrolier Building will identify you as the

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postman who brought that letter to Conway. And I've got other proofs, which I'll keep to myself for a while. Now will you come across?"

"Humph. Suppose I blow out your —— brains, instead."

"It wouldn't save you. The story, corrected, goes to press at twelve sharp unless I stop it——"

"You —— fool. Get up and go to that telephone and tell the *Gazette* to kill the whole thing—the whole of it, mind you. Quick, now."

A pistol in Heber's hand gave point to his orders.

But Mason only smiled.

"No good, Heber," he answered. "I've provided for all that. Any 'phone order from me to kill the story will be the signal for putting it on the street as an extra. Come across, Heber. Come across."

Heber put up his pistol, slowly.

"I'll divide," he said.

"Nix. No division. I want all—all, you understand."

The detective's courage was breaking.

"I suppose you'll kill the story if I come across?" he questioned.

"I can't. Too many people know it. But I can hold it back for twenty-four hours, and I will if you cough up. I'll be glad to give you that much chance to get away. You see, I've got some personal feeling in the matter, Heber. I didn't like Werder—although I never saw him. If I'd seen—and known—him any time before today I should probably have killed him myself. So I'm not ungrateful to the man who did it for me. That's why I'm willing to give you a chance."

"A —— of a chance it is," growled the detective. "I'd have a better one if I killed you and cleared out with the jewels. You've got to do better than that."

But Mason shook his head.

"Can't be done, I tell you," he insisted. "And you'll have a whole lot better chance than you'd have if you killed me. What if you are caught and tried for killing Werder. You mightn't be convicted. You know what our juries are. A clever lawyer might save you by pointing out what a hell-hound Werder was—and all that. But if you murdered the *Gazette* reporter who ran you down—well, that would be another story, Heber. You can size it up for yourself.

"But—" Mason's voice grew stern—"you've got to decide at once. I've just enough time to get to the *Gazette* office and stop that yarn—for twenty-four hours. And I'm not going without the jewels. So come across—quick."

Heber glanced at the clock.

"You win," he said briefly. "I'll get them jewels."

He went out.

Mason sat still and waited. Not yet was he certain that he had won. The minutes seemed to stretch into years.

Then Heber came back with a packet in his hand. For a moment he stood balancing it and glaring at Mason.

"—— you," he grated. "I've got a good mind to take a chance and choke the life out of you even yet."

His clutching fingers quivered with the passion that shook his huge body. Then suddenly he flung the packet on the table.

"Take it," he growled and went out.

Mason snatched up the packet and followed the detective to the door and out of the building. Once in the street he called.

"Heber!" he said, when the other had faced about. "I've got an automatic covering you from my overcoat pocket—and I have had it there for most of our interview. So don't many any rash moves. I'm going to keep my bargain with you; I'm not going to publish that story for twenty-four hours. And I'm not going to have you arrested for killing Werder. And I think it very likely that you'll never be punished for killing him.

"I'm grateful to you for taking the job off my hands, and I'm going to do what I can for you on that count. But on another count—Heber! I'm a Secret Service agent, and you're a German spy who killed Werder because the Kaiser ordered you to kill him and not because he was a scoundrel for whom hell is too good. I've been on your trail for three months. You've lived in this country for fifteen years and you've married in it and grown well-to-do in it. And you've betrayed it.

"You've been sending information to Germany right along. You're not going to be arrested for Werder's murder, but you are going to be interned for the rest of the war. You ought to be shot as a spy, but I don't suppose you will be. We're too mealy-mouthed over here as yet. But you're going to be arrested. My men are all around you. And you haven't any

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bullets in your pistol; they were all drawn an hour ago.

"Moreover, my men raided your home an hour ago. They didn't find the jewels, of course; and when they telephoned me that they hadn't I took a chance on your having them at the station. But they did find something else; they found your pistol and your silencer and some of your devil's pills—those tiny bombs filled with poison gas that killed Werder half a second after you fired them into his room that morning.

"You covered your tracks well, Heber; and if it hadn't been for Sweeny—but there always is a Sweeny, Heber! There's got to be one. God sends him. That's one thing that you Germans don't seem able to understand. God lets you go just so far; and then he throws something—some Sweeny—across your path and everything ends. Brute force can't rule the world today, Heber! Boys!"

Out of the shadows of the night half a dozen men appeared and closed in. Heber looked at them.

"*Kamarad!*" he said. "I surrender."

AN APACHE TRAILER'S KEENNESS

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

THE Indian is a natural-born trailer. Especially among the Apaches is this a seemingly "born gift." The least suspicious thing while following a trail—an overturned stone, a broken twig, a bent bush; any recent disturbance to the ground over which he is trailing—are to him signs which the ordinary observer would pass unnoticed.

During the last Apache trouble it is recorded that one of the tribe of Jicarrilla Apaches, who was noted as a marvelous trailer and scout, returning to his teepee one day, discovered that a haunch of venison, which he had but recently brought in, was missing.

The keen eye of the Apache at once began to take in the surroundings. After a few minutes devoted to close observation, he started off at a trot with his eyes fixed on the ground, closely scanning the trail ahead. Some little distance from his village he met a party of traders with whom he was acquainted. He stopped them and inquired if they had seen a little old white man, carrying a carbine and a haunch of venison, followed by a small, bob-tailed dog?

The traders said they had passed such a person. The Indian then made them acquainted with his loss, and the astonished traders inquired how he was able to give such a perfect description of the thief. The Apache replied:

"Him little man. Make pile stones to stand on to reach deer meat in teepee. Him old man. Take short steps—so. Him white man—turn toes out. Injun toe in. Him have short gun—Injun see mark on tree where gun sight scrape bark off. Him have little dog—make little track. Dog have bob-tail—Injun see mark of tail in sand along arroyo where dog sit down."

With a grunt the Apache continued the pursuit, and it is recorded that he soon overtook the thief and recaptured his stolen venison.

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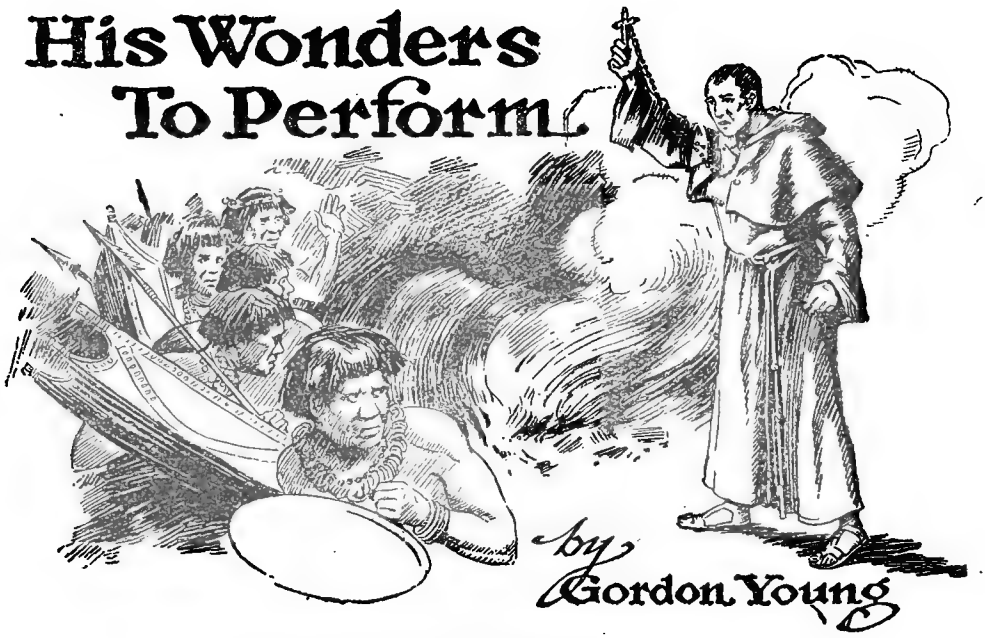
His Wonders To Perform



by Gordon Young

Author of "U. S. A.," "The Serpent's Phrase," etc.

A GROUP of natives rigged out in the usual Sunday fashion were on their way to church. The women wore calico wrappers with strange-looking Christian millinery a-top their bushy heads. The men sweated and squirmed under the weight of cast-off European clothing. We lazily watched them from the shade of a lone coconut palm down near the water's edge in a very convenient place for idle sailors.

"That makes me sick," said the pale, skinny youth who had been fidgeting about. "These preachers what can't make a living back in God's country come out here and loaf around on fat jobs and talk pious to tame heathens. If they've got such a stand-in with the Lord, why don't they go off where there's some danger? Hypocrites and cowards—the whole lot of 'em."

"Lean Jake" Brundage, who for an hour or more had lain motionless, his arms folded under the back of his head and his feet propped high against the palm-bole, slowly lowered his legs and sat up, looking curiously at the youth.

"I reckon," Jake began, drawling softly as befitted the wisdom of forty-odd years in the South Seas, "you been out here 'bout three months? Uh-huh. 'Bout three months, 'cause from the way you wiggle 'round I reckon you only got blisters where later on you'll have good cushion calluses like the rest o' us.

"Maybe you never heard o' the Rev. John Williams? No. Nor o' Bishopy Patteson, or o' Chalmers, nor o' the Gordon brothers? Quite some cowards—all of 'em. Expected to be killed sooner or later, an' wasn't disappointed—none of 'em. Down Erromango way four missionaries was cooked 'fore Robertson come along just two months and some days after the last one. An' he stuck.

"I reckon these here heathens in Mother Hubbards and old pants ain't so very alarmin'; but I reckon, too, you'd been steppin' some toward your home town if you'd seen 'em when Missionary Webb first come. He died o' the usual missionary complaint. Him an' his daughter.

"An' I reckon you never heard o' Father Meyton? No. Great coward he was. Used to ask the Lord to forgive him 'cause sometimes he felt kind o' reluctant-like 'bout bein' killed and cooked."

II

MORE than thirty years before Father Meyton came below the line to carry the Bible on to Triblayt; but he couldn't find it. An old missionary father had told him that it was

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an inhabited reef of the Solomon group to which the tribes 'round about sent young men to learn fetish rites and devil-devil dances.

Convert Triblayt and a host of cannibal gods would be left to stare bulbous-eyed across their deserted shrines. So far as was known, the old priest had said, the footprint of no white man had ever been left on Triblayt's beach. He had heard of it from converts who fearfully claimed that it was the home of the Solomon devils; but they were no less vague as to its location than are more civilized Christians concerning the home of Beelzebub.

Father Meyton was a mere boy, utterly ignorant of the world's red devils except as dim flashes had reached to his cloisters. Why he was alone, what authority he had or lacked from the church, no one ever knew. But like youth, secular or consecrated, he was zealous to do the great thing first. Fear he knew not; and the old, old traditions of Rome's mighty fathers who had gone from Iceland's snows to Afric's sands foamed through his blood.

He inquired of Triblayt from colonial officials, from the Admiralty itself; from sandalwood companies, pearl-fishers and roving traders. In priestly robes and with a large, ivory crucifix thrust through the cord at his waist, he even went into the grog-shops and along the Sydney wharves questioning broken-down wanderers—old bearded fellows who knew more than the Lord ever intended any man should; but some knew nought of Triblayt though they could tell strange stories of other unheard-of lands; and some said that though the name had a familiar sound to their ears, they thought it was just a legend. All savages in those waters, he was told, have legends about some unfindable island or other.

Father Meyton went to Captain Greeger. Greeger was a short, broad-bodied man, known as "Bull" because he had no neck. The base of his head was flush on his shoulders so when he glanced from side to side he must needs turn his body. His face was peculiar: the lower part was heavy, almost massive; the lips thick and wet and hungry for women; but the nose, humped as an owl's beak, was scarcely larger.

He was a gambler of the seas—queer, superstitious, suspected of piracy and known to be guilty of much as bad. A trader and "blackbirder," he sailed the *Susy Brown*, a slow-going bark with a roomy hell in the hold for tricked and trapped natives that he furnished to Queensland plantations.

He was fearful of his life, could shoot the wing off a flying-fish, and at sea sternly enforced the tabu of the old Fijian chiefs and put to death any black boy that tried to pass behind his back; but, once started on a spree, nothing—no falling barometer, no boiling reefs, no muttering of the crew—nothing—could keep him from running the usual course of three or four days' stupor behind the bolted cabin door. And he lived through it all while more cautious and Christian skippers all over the South Seas were being wrecked and murdered.

Greeger knew where Triblayt was. A storm had once knocked him about and a nigger had pointed it out. One island was as good as another in his business, except that those where he was unknown were better, and he had always planned to go back there recruiting.

It was bad luck to carry a priest. It made the devil hostile to a ship. But if Father Meyton wasn't in any hurry, and was willing first to do a little rambling around over in the Fijis, Greeger guessed he'd take chances with the devil and carry him. No. The priest couldn't pay for passage. No reason at all, Greeger said, only he couldn't.

III

IN DUE time the *Susy Brown* had a tug put to her nose and was dragged out of Sydney Harbor. Three days at sea, and the woman appeared on deck.

The wind was blustering up, and Lean Jake Brundage was in the waist giving orders overhead when she came out of the skipper's cabin in the after house. Father Meyton was beside him looking up at the agile, naked blacks, busy with canvas and gaskets.

"Yes, Father," he was explaining, "it's just like 'ma'am' or 'sir' to these niggers. They'd think you wasn't polite if you didn't swear now and then—just sea language—different from talk——"

Brundage stopped. He had seen the woman; and she—well, on board Bull Greeger's ship a hundred leagues from shore was the last place on earth one would expect to find a priest.

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Brundage had known that she was on board. He had helped her and the skipper over the gangway the night before they sailed; and he had judged that it would be about three days before she sobered up.

But it was the expression on her haggard face that made Brundage forget what he was saying. Slender and sick she stood, and her black eyes were glazed unbelievingly in a sort of dazed horror. Then she shrank back and would have retreated into the cabin if Father Meyton had not turned to see at what Brundage was looking.

The young priest did not hesitate. He had not known of her.

But she was a woman. She was alone on the ship. She came from Captain Greeger's cabin. He bowed and said welcomingly—

"Good morning, Mrs. Greeger."

The woman's eyes shot appealingly at Brundage. A nervous hand fluttered to her cheek and she stammered weakly—

"G-good morning, Fa-Father."

Later, by the wheel, Greeger growled to Brundage:

"Needn't let him know she ain't my wife. Don't make no odds one way or t'other, but needn't let him know, that's all." Then, presently, he added: "That she tiger-cat nearly tore me to pieces for not tellin' 'er he was on board. I know'd it was bad luck to carry a priest—an' it sure is."

Marie pretended illness. She was ill with more than pains in the body. Against her will, memories raised themselves like points of fire in darkness, and she tried to roll the stone back before the tomb of her Saviour; but like that other Mary Magdalene, who in the gray dawn had perceived that He was not dead but living, she shuddered in awful amazement and wondered—wondered fearfully.

Marie was not pretty. Perhaps in other days she had been. No matter what her years, she had grown lurid and haggard with permanent dark rings under her fiery black eyes; and when there was no rouge on her lips, they were colorless as though a vampire had kissed them. A long, long time indeed it had been since boy or man had looked upon her face and been ignorant of what she was.

"I'll go mad, mad, mad," she cried one midnight to Brundage, "if he doesn't get off this ship."

"First whale we see I'll toss him overboard, Jonah-like," the mate answered sardonically; not mocking her, but wary out of much experience against letting a woman make a confidant of him.

Besides he knew Bull Greeger; and it was not wise to be in the least friendly with his woman—" 'specially when a feller didn't want her nohow."

And the depression that had at first seemed to be little more than the embarrassment of Marie and the curious silence of Greeger grew more visible.

The black boys, always strangely acute to the moods of a ship, felt something was wrong; and instead of singing and skylarking, sat around evenings talking low among themselves. And a crew of fifteen silent Polynesians is as uncanny as anything else contrary to nature.

The skipper became extremely solitary and moody though he did not seem to be drinking any more than usual; and he and Marie began to avoid each other; or more exactly, he appeared to be keeping away from her even as she tried to avoid Father Meyton.

The priest alone was unaffected by the ominous quiet, the tense atmosphere of impendence as though the devil had made a bomb and every one was breathless to see when it would explode. Even the wind had grown breathless, too, and the sails hung listlessly on the yards. But Father Meyton received Marie's excuse for leaving him at its apparent value, stopped frequently at the cabin door to inquire as to how she was feeling; and sympathized with Greeger because his wife was not well. Nor did he feel those inflamed eyes of Greeger's when they stood talking together, or rather when Father Meyton stood talking to him.

Brundage cursed the day the Lord made the ocean, for something hung on the ship so heavily that it seemed to have loaded the *Susy Brown* so that she scarcely moved. In fact Greeger, after leaning far over the side for a long time, swore that she drew three feet more of water than when they had passed the Heads; and in spite of Brundage's scornful laugh, he said she must be aleak or something and went down to see what the matter was, then came back unable to conceal his anxiety because he could find nothing to account for it.

After Greeger was gone, Brundage had a long look at the water-line, but he could not

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see any difference. Then he talked to himself like a mate to a timid lubber for having been jumpy enough to think that Greeger might possibly have been right. If Greeger's nerves are jangled, he told himself, it was no reason for getting a streak of lunacy, too.

The next morning Greeger abruptly changed the course and headed north.

"How about the Fijis, Mr. Greeger?" Brundage ventured.

"I'm goin' a-get rid o' this —— priest first," Greeger said, hunching his shoulders resolutely so that they came up to his ears, giving him the appearance of some monstrous, half-human bird with wings folded.

From that time on he did queer things like douse his pipe in water after a smoke to keep from setting fire to the ship with the ashes; and he nearly brained the cook one day after Father Meyton had been in the galley looking about interestedly, and he wouldn't touch a bite of the supper for fear of poison.

Then came the night when in the middle watch Brundage heard a gun crack, and leaped forward in time to see Greeger kicking the dead body of a Kanaka.

"Tried to knife me, he did," Greeger shouted jerkily with many oaths. "Tried to sneak right up behind me. Saw it glisten, an' I potted 'im. Lousy nigger. I knowed he was put up to it, an' I was watchin'."

Brundage looked about the deck but he could not find the knife. He did not believe there had been one. The Kanaka probably hadn't thought the form in the shadow of the foremast was the skipper's or he wouldn't have tried to pass behind it.

"I know why he wants to git rid o' me—I know why!" Greeger roared in a hoarse voice against Brundage's ear.

"Well," Brundage replied grimly, "you've got rid o' him."

"I don't mean *him*," Greeger shouted, flinging a contemptuous kick at the body in the scupperway, around which stood several black boys, silent, white-eyed with fright. "I mean — you know who I mean——"

In a whirlwind of oaths, Greeger poured out his lunatic suspicions; and Brundage dropped his shoulders against the foremast for support as he listened.

"All I can do is keep him from doin' me," Greeger explained with the aid of waving fists. "I daren't pot him. I'd be wrecked or somethin'. I knowed it was bad luck to carry him, but I thought doin' a bit o' good wouldn't hurt me none. He's after my woman an' knows I daren't touch him. God A'mighty 'd strike me dead. I'm makin' for Triblayt, an' him prayin' to becalm me, an' the sails hangin' loose as fish-nets.

"He knows I daren't touch him. He stands there talkin' to her with his head poked through the cabin—then he comes right up to me an' says he's sorry my wife ain't better. Just darin' me to do somethin', he is. An', by God, I'll do it too, if he don't quit prayin' to becalm me so he can stay longer on my ship!"

Savages, and most men who are superstitious, make scant distinction between the diabolical and the divine: upon whom the gods favor, they bestow the high power of sorcery to be used at will. Greeger's theology was no further advanced.

Marie rushed upon them.

In the faint moonlight Brundage could see that her face was pale with terror as she gasped:

"Who was it? Who was it? Bull—Brundage—tell me!"

"A Kanaka tried to knife the skipper," Brundage said; and Marie went limp from sheer relief.

IV

ONCE and only once did Father Meyton speak of his mission and ideals. Brundage brought it about by saying:

"Tell you what, Father. Better let us go about an' drop you off some place else. There's lots o' ports full o' whites needin' missionaries an' they don't eat—that is, they're whites, you know, that have slipped some toward the permanent abidin'-place o' dead heathens. I ain't tryin' to stop you or nothin', understand—but I'm just sayin' it would be a little less like suicide if you went 'mong white men that sort a need a little Gospel."

"I know. I know," the boy priest answered in a low, strained voice, his eyes far as though scanning some definite horizon between earth and sky. "But who am I to be afraid when our Blessed Saviour with full foreknowledge of the dreadful agony, trod cross-laden up Golgotha? And as

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though symbolic of that divine and holiest of all possibly holy sacrifices, so by the blood and bones of martyrs is the salvation of these benighted children to be won. I will go on and on to whatever fate mine may be, for He will give me the courage to meet and to maintain with dignity becoming His servant, however lowly, whatever ordeals may beset my path!"

He spoke with awe-compelling fervor. His eyes flamed from a head thrown back in the hauteur of unconscious courage, and his upstretched arm pointed not to the star-spotted, nebulous sky, but to the very face of God himself.

And Brundage, hardened, tough, impious, old shellback that he was, dropped his head in momentary reverence. In that instant, he understood why and how Polynesians and Melanesians, who, for all their savagery and cannibalism, were as responsive as children to dramatic recital, had in such large numbers been converted.

V

MANY days went by about as usual; then one morning Marie said to Brundage—

"Bull's at it again—bad!"

Which was her way of saying that the skipper was dead drunk.

It took unusual diplomacy on the part of Brundage to convince Father Meyton that the correct way to sympathize with "sick" sailormen, especially with one confined to his cabin, was at a distance. It invariably made a sailor worse to have anybody try to do something for him. Father Meyton was asked to notice that even Brundage, the mate, stayed away from the cabin; and that the cook had been ousted from the trade-room so that Marie might be away from Greeger during his illness.

Marie, no longer feeling Greeger's suspicious eyes on her, did not continue to avoid Father Meyton, though she did not put herself in his way. As ever, she was respectful to him to the point of embarrassment. His robe and crucifix represented all that was left to her of sacred things—things not to be jested with—to be guarded—not even to be spoken of.

Greeger's protracted drunkenness rather relieved the curse which he imagined had nearly becalmed the *Susy Brown;* for a wind came up and hurried them along.

"We're due for a good landfall with daybreak," Brundage said as he came to Father Meyton and Marie, who stood aft, faces in the wind, watching the heavy swells that raced along in the moonlight like immense billows of molten green glass with boiling, foamy crests that broke before the wind, while the rigging tautly hummed and the ship creaked.

It was there that Greeger found the three of them when he burst half-sober and the more crazy for it, from his cabin. Rushing up, he struck the astonished priest a backhanded blow, then seizing Marie, half-carried, half-dragged her off with him.

Father Meyton steadied himself against the taffrail and looked wonderingly in the direction that Greeger had gone.

"I came nearly being knocked into the sea. The captain must be—be—delirious."

"He does have queer spells ever' now an' then. An' I guess Triblayt ain't such a bad place after all. We'll see it by sun-up. Maybe 'fore."

VI

THAT morning during the middle watch, just before daybreak, Brundage was stirred from his sleep by a soft hand shaking him.

"What the ——," he challenged, drawing back his arm to strike the figure partly concealed by the shadows in the cabin.

"Shh-h—it's me," the woman whispered. "I had to do it—Bull would have killed him. Look. She held her face close, but Brundage could imagine better than he could see. "He nearly killed me. I'm blood all over. I told him it wasn't the priest—I just had to tell him something—he kept beating me till I did. He would have killed the priest—" and the horror of it made her almost inarticulate, but she added in a faint whisper—"now he thinks it's *you!*"

A bevy of lurid oaths was unloosened from Brundage's throat.

"I just had to tell him something," she whispered defensively over and over. "He wouldn't believe me, till I did."

"Great gods, woman—the priest lands tomorrow! Why did you do it?"

"I just had to. He'd have killed him anyway. He's afraid of you," she went on quickly, encouragingly. "When I told him it was you, he said he didn't believe it. I told him he just didn't want to believe it

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because he knows your reputation, and——"

"Shut up," Brundage ordered hoarsely.

"I won't shut up! I left him in there drunk——"

But as though conjured by her words, Bull Greeger filled the doorway. He was drunk; but the revolver in his hand seemed singularly steady, as though detached from his weaving body. And though he was drunk, he knew what he was about. He laughed as he swayed in the doorway, laughed horribly and abused Marie and Brundage with every word and thought to which he could give tongue.

And in the course of his abuse, he disclosed that he had not believed the lying slut at first, but thought she was trying to hide the priest under her skirt; so Greeger had pretended to be drunk again that he might see to whom Marie went when she slipped out of the cabin.

Brundage tried to say something, but Greeger would not listen. He bellowed for Smith, a villainous boatswain; and he came running. Smith showed a wicked pleasure at seeing Marie and Brundage trapped, and familiarly congratulated the skipper. A guard was put over them with orders to knock the first one unconscious that said a word.

By dawn the *Susy Brown* was on Triblayt, and with men in the chains, Greeger stood in for a half-moon beach where canoes could be seen through his binoculars. Before Father Meyton had come on deck a boat had been lowered away, Marie and Brundage tumbled into it and under the command of Smith and a half-dozen black boys, Greeger's present to the cannibal chief was on its way.

VII

Father Meyton was plausibly told by Greeger that Brundage had gone ashore to give the chief presents and smooth the way for a cordial welcome of the priest; and that Marie had gone along because she wished to see the natives. When the crew returned and the boat was hoisted to its davits, Father Meyton began to be apprehensive. He was intensely alarmed and shocked when he saw Greeger gleefully drunk, and Smith being allowed to help himself from the same bottle.

He tried to get members of the crew to talk, but they moved away from him, furtively hiding their glances on the deck. He tried to talk to Greeger and Smith, but they answered with insults.

The long day wore away; and most of it Father Meyton stood hopefully by the railing looking toward the beach and the natives, naked, with long spears and cowrie ornaments that gave the black arms and legs barbaric splendor.

"Plenty 'em never see white man or ship 'fore," one of the black boys explained to Father Meyton; but he immediately drew away with a frightened stare when the priest asked him about Brundage and Marie.

Night came. Soon after a great shouting arose on the beach and a huge fire threw its fitful flame against the shadows of the bush and far out over the water. The night was black with overhanging clouds as though the stars had shut their eyes against such things as were being done, for shapes emerged from the jungle shadows and could be seen darting and leaping and yelling like fiends at a revel in the bottomless pit.

Greeger and Smith stood in bleary companionship leaning drunkenly against the bulwark. They shouted and laughed, and urged the cannibals on with words that they could not hear, for the distance was too great for articulated words; and could not have been understood, for the language was alien. But Greeger and Smith enjoyed themselves.

Father Meyton heard. He could not believe—and yet, he knew something terrible was afoot. Again and again he threw his hands to his ears to shut out the howls of the white men, which were worse, far worse, than the distance-softened yells from the beach inferno.

In the shadow by the forward deck-house he went down on his knees in angry prayer. When he arose the white cook was there respectfully waiting to speak to him. The cook told him the truth—the whole truth, who Marie was and all about her—and that Greeger had threatened to shoot whoever let the priest know what had been done that day; he could not endure longer to hold the ghastly secret of the feast fire, which would soon be a bed of coals. Then the living bodies would be laid on it. Cannibals preferred to cook victims alive. It gave the flesh a better flavor.

Father Meyton strode aft. The majesty of wrath was on him, and his tongue became as a lash of scorpions. He did not know

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the superstitious fear of him that was in the heart of Greeger; but he spoke to put there the fear of God and of eternal damnation. He did. His words strummed unerringly on the chords of terror in Greeger's mind; and Greeger struck Smith down with a mighty blow when the drunken sailor, less fearful of the priest, thought to please the captain by coarse mockery.

The distant howling of the cannibals at their frenzied dance around the roaring flames mingled strangely with the words of Father Meyton. Greeger heard and trembled. He fearfully protested against attempting a rescue. They would all be killed—he had but three white sailors and his black boys were cowards.

"Less so than their captain!" Father Meyton thundered, his accusing hand leveled straight into Greeger's blanched face. "Get that boat ready and take me to the beach. My faith is not in the power of a drunken wretch such as you to save that man and that poor woman. And if they come not alive back to this ship, you are damned eternally—eternally. Give orders for that boat—then down on your knees, miserable man, and pray God that we be not too late."

Greeger stumbled forward, calling the crew to the davits.

Ten men were at the oars and Father Meyton stood in the stern, where Greeger sat with his hand on the tiller. He made the beach, but he was careful to land at a good distance from the fire—far enough away not to be seen in its light.

Father Meyton, without a word, gathered his robe about him, jumped out into the shallow water and ran up the beach.

No one had seen the boat approach. Few saw the priest until shoving right through the ring of wild, naked, trinket-decked dancers that brandished spears and clubs, he suddenly appeared by the fire where Brundage and Marie lay bound. His uplifted hand held on high the white ivory crucifix that gleamed and sparkled in the leaping light; and in a voice that rose clear and firm above the beating of the wood drums and howls, he cried—

"In the name of Christ—stop this hellish rite!"

With grunts and deep-throated cluckings of surprise and doubt, threescore wild black men stood in their tracks, their grotesque, horribly smeared faces turned in awed amazement toward the strange, solitary figure—unarmed, unafraid—that had appeared in their midst as though dropped from the sky. None such as he had ever been seen by them. He was cloaked from shoulders to feet, and the folds of his robe were not unlike pinions that might have borne him through the air. Moreover, his face was the face of a young and mighty chieftain in anger, and his voice was the voice of wrath.

But still more than that was the upheld crucifix—as though their worship was commanded. Gods they had in numbers uncounted—gods of wood and stone—and the awful power of each when exorcised by witch-men struck terror into the bravest. But terrible, most terrible, must be the power of this new god to bring through air and over sea this strange man who was alone, unarmed, and unafraid. Those nearest shrank back, their heads bowed humbly, but with eyes upturned in fascinated awe at the gleaming cross.

An old witch-man, withered, almost bent double by the magic whale's teeth about his neck, slowly came forward, a bit fearful, but jealous of his prestige and determined to challenge this intruder.

Father Meyton had turned his eyes about the circle searching for those with authority; and the witch-man had no sooner started toward him than the priest, forgetting his was a tongue of distant lands, began impassionedly to address him; and as he advanced, fervidly exhorting and expounding, he gestured with the upraised crucifix.

The story of salvation was never told to wilder men, nor to those that listened more attentively; for though they understood no word, they did understand the intense sincerity and dramatic passion far better than civilized men, smelted between hot city walls and poured into molds designed to keep them restrained and calmed. The witch-man, knowing well that no god of his would ever have given him the courage, much less the magic, to appear in the midst of a sacred feast of a stranger tribe, drew back step by step, fearful to tempt the power of this new god to a decisive test.

In the blazing, critical eyes of the fierce, naked men who watched, with each step backward their long-feared witch-man acknowledged that this god was greater than any known to him; so that when the priest suddenly sank to his knees, holding the crucifix up before him, a restless stir went

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through the silent watchers. They prayed to gods, and on their knees and faces: and one by one at first, then in groups until the old witch-man alone was standing, they fell down and lowered their heads to the sand in abject humility.

When Father Meyton arose he could scarcely believe the miracle his eyes declared: threescore savages, but a moment before in the frenzy of a cannibal fetish, were bowed to earth in adoration of the Blessed Saviour. And in the ecstasy of joy, he lifted up his face and arms to heaven and gave voice to his thankfulness, while the tribesmen yet trembled with awe, prostrate on the sand.

Then stooping down, he quickly loosed the fiber thongs about Marie and Brundage, told them where the boat was and bade them go—go without him.

The witch-man, seeing what this intruder was about, anxiously shrieked a warning; and the cannibals sprang to their feet, poised indecisively. But the priest was simply without fear. So much so, as to be unaware of danger. He pointed into the darkness along the edge of the water, and again bade the reluctant Brundage and Marie go.

As they started, the warriors sullenly, wonderingly, keyed to kill or kneel, but taut for something dramatic and decisive, gave back a little to let them pass.

In the silence, the silence of hushed, waiting men, only the steps of the man and woman crunching over the coral pebbles were heard, until the old witch-man, perhaps cunningly suspecting something of what was happening, and certainly furious to see himself supplanted, again cried out. But not a black form moved or answered.

Then, snatching a spear from a youth, he drew back his arm to hurl it at the priest, who stood praying with muted lips before the uplifted crucifix. But, on the instant, a huge chief's war club whirled aloft and fell—and the witch-man dropped lifeless to the sand. The new god should have respect and sacrifice!

Greeger had seen and heard. He knew a miracle had been enacted before his eyes, as did Brundage and Marie and all the crew; so that it was an awed and sobered ship that again set sail for the port of white men.

INTO HARBOR

by HARRY KEMP

A HEAVING buoy began to moan from the wave-whispering dark
In warning where some bare-swept rock lurked upward-toothed and stark.
With flying stars our signal-light lifted and leaped and roared,
And a fire-eyed boat came creeping out. The pilot swung aboard.

Oh, we were hungry for the shore for exiles we had been,
Where every heart beat lonelier still when one lone sail was seen.
No cities woke with morning there, where man with mankind meets.
There were no blaring concert-halls, no rooms with bars and seats.
There were only gulls and albatross and long green waves for streets.

But now God's land was close again. Far up the darkling bay,
With jewels tangled in her hair, the mighty city lay.
So, singing loud, we furled the sails, for here was life again,
Where we could push with moving throngs and meet our fellow men.

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The Bully of the Big Santee

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Man Who Whipped a City," "Tennessee Joe," etc.

THE moment in which I first laid eyes on "Slim Jack" Bewley is a moment that I am not likely to forget. It was on a Saturday night, and the heaviest snow I had ever seen fall in Tennessee's mountains had fallen that day. Old Bildad's place was merry with the merriment of nearly all the timberjacks of the three neighboring logging outfits. The fiddler and the banjoist, ensconced behind a huge and roaring wood-burning stove, were ripping along on "The Devil's Weddin' March," and the rough board floor vibrated as booted and corduroyed loggers swung their "girls"—which were other booted and corduroyed loggers with red or blue bandannas tied about their left arms—'round and 'round in an old-fashioned and hilarious mountain dance.

I was standing beside the door when the stranger entered. He too wore corduroys and high-laced boots, though his footwear was of a pattern not familiar to us; and he too wore a blue flannel shirt and a broad-brimmed black hat. His face was sunburned and smooth, and ruddy from the cold and good health; he was tall and rather lean, and there was a sort of panther-like quickness evident in his movements.

After flinging a stuffed suit-case to a corner, he stamped snow from his feet and began to look about him interestedly. The music and the dancing stopped, and everybody stared. There was almost a perfect silence until the Little Pigeon River country's bully, who worked with the Bad Ax outfit, stepped toward the newcomer—

"Who're you?"

The strange timberjack smiled a very small, cold smile. His head went up just a little, and his topaz-brown eyes were like fire. A great defiance was in the few words he spoke in answer to the plain challenge of the acknowledged champion fighter of our three camps.

"I," said he, with the suggestion of a hillman's drawl in his clear voice, "I am the bully of the Big Santee."

Most of us expected to see a lively battle forthwith. "Grizzly" McMasters had been drinking, and he was quarrelsome and formidable when he was sober; I have seen that man, in a sudden fit of anger, split a pine board with his naked fist. Though not so tall as the newcomer, he was heavier, broader, and built like a bear; he was hairy all over, and his beard was short and thick and curled.

By the countenance of McMasters, I saw that he recognized the newcomer

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now. And he didn't appear to be especially glad to see him.

"Big Santee," said Grizzly, his demeanor meek enough. "Where is sech a camp as that?"

"It's no camp," the stranger clipped. "It's the biggest, meanest, muddiest river in South Carolina. They log it. River drive. I reckon you'd as well go on with your frolic."

McMasters didn't want to fight, anybody could have seen that. The musicians, if musicians they may be called, began another "march" that had the time of a reel, and the dancers danced again. The man from South Carolina turned to me.

"My name is Jackson Bewley," he said; and again I noted a bare suggestion of the mountaineer's drawl in his voice. "I'm twenty-five years old, and I raise the beam at a hundred and sixty-eight. I've outlived one enlistment in the Army, and two years on the Big Santee. That tells you who I am, and gives me a sort o' right to ask you some questions; eh?"

"My name is Woods," I reciprocated. "I'm from Nashville, and I'm up here to learn the business of lumbering from the bottom. Fire away with your questions; I'll be glad to answer all I'm able to answer."

Jackson Bewley shook hands with me, and we have been rather good friends since that time.

"I hear that McMasters is high, low, jack and the game, the whole thing, in this section," said Bewley. "Is that correct?"

"Eminently," I told him. "McMasters runs everything but the commissary—this place here, you know—and the superintendents."

Bewley half-closed his left eye and nodded.

"And is there," he went on, "a young woman named Hallie Porter living anywhere in this neighborhood?"

"There is," I answered. "She lives with an uncle and an aunt a mile down Bad Ax Creek, and she's one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen. Her own people, I have heard, are all dead except this one aunt. Miss Porter came from the Blackfern Mountain country, I understand. It seems that old Dolliver and his wife have made a sort of Cinderella of her. She goes dressed very poorly, I know."

Again my companion half-closed his left eye and nodded slowly.

"And," said I, "Grizzly McMasters annoys the girl a great deal. He wants her to marry him."

Something I saw in Bewley's countenance made me almost afraid of him. He bent toward me.

"There's not a bit o' danger o' her marryin' Grizzly McMasters," he half whispered. "Because Grizzly is a brute and a coward at heart and a yellow dog, and a murderer besides, and she knows it. Listen, Woods, and I'll tell you some things you maybe don't know; and I don't care if you tell everybody:

"McMasters hails from the Blackfern country, as well as the girl, and so do I. And so does Bildad McWhorter, that rascally old rail over there behind the counter. The girl sure has had tough luck, Woods. Back on the Blackfern, her father and old McWhorter found a mica mine. Bildad, the —— Judas, turned Tom Porter up for makin' moonshine whisky, and Tom crippled an officer when they arrested him. Tom went to the pen, and Old Bildad sold the mine and kept all o' the money, as he'd planned.

"Soon after Porter got back, he died. The pen killed him. Hallie then hiked out over here to get away from the temptation o' shootin' Bildad McWhorter herself—that was one reason; the other reason was that she had nowhere else to go. You see, there was no man Porter left. And now Old Bildad too is over here, where she has to see him every so often! Woods, I call that mis'rable luck!"

"Yes," I agreed. "It's miserable luck."

He straightened, took a tight hold on himself, and smiled.

"This womanless dance hall and commissary combined is a little out o' the ordinary run o' things, ain't it?" he asked.

"The three outfits in this vicinity are all owned by one company," I explained, "and they built one commissary for everybody. Old Bildad himself pays the fiddler and his partner, and—you'll find it out for yourself sooner or later—somebody sells the timberjacks' whisky that has never been contaminated by a revenue stamp, and splits the profits with Old Bildad."

At that instant the door behind us opened, and a gust of the sharp night air swept in upon us. I turned to see Hallie Porter entering, and she was alone; she wore a ragged shawl about her fine shoulders

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and her well-shaped hands were almost blue from the bitter cold. I frowned; it was no place for a lone woman, at that hour, commissary that it was. Bewley looked hard at her, but she didn't see him. She went straight across the big room and to the commissary clerk, the angular and bewhiskered Old Bildad, whom I now knew she very cordially hated.

Hallie threw a few pieces of silver to the counter, and received half an armful of canned and boxed groceries. While it was going on, I touched Bewley's arm and whispered:

"Bill Dolliver has sent that poor little woman out in all this snow instead of coming himself. Rotten, isn't it?"

"Rotten!" growled Jackson Bewley, seeming very angry. "It's worse than rotten."

The girl started for the door, and Grizzly McMasters stepped squarely in front of her. He made a move as though he would take her packages, and his grin was an insult. Hallie tilted her nose a trifle, and tried to pass him, but he cut her off again. At this, Bewley hurried to McMasters, caught him by a shoulder and wheeled him an about-face without any apparent effort. Once more the music and the dancing stopped suddenly.

"When a man has got a drink in him," said Jackson Bewley to the Little Pigeon River country's bully, "he's got no right to walk home with any decent woman. And *you* have no right to walk with any decent woman at any time."

For half a minute there was a heavy stillness. To the intense surprise of us all, McMasters again refused to see the gauntlet. He looked sickish, and went idly toward the roaring stove.

Bewley turned toward the girl and smiled, took off his hat and proffered his hand.

"Don't you remember me, Hallie?" he said hopefully.

Hallie Porter stood as motionless as a frozen tree. Her chestnut-brown head had a poise that was strikingly proud, and yet, she seemed somehow pitiful when one took note of the poor clothing she wore. The chestnut-brown eyes flashed contempt at Bewley's rather lean, strong hand.

"Not to save your life, Slim Jack," she said coolly, with a perfect control over herself, "not to save your life."

With that she deliberately walked around him, crossed the floor with the tread of some royal person, and disappeared in the cold, bleak night. And she closed the door carefully behind her, as though that would prevent her being followed.

SLIM JACK! The logging-camps pounce upon a nickname quickly, and the Little Pigeon's three outfits soon forgot that Bewley's name was Bewley in the sheer glory of calling him Slim Jack. For the newcomer went to work with the Bad Ax outfit, which was very glad to have him—all, that is, but Grizzly McMasters, who had suddenly fallen to zero in the estimation of his fellows.

And what a prodigious worker Bewley was! He was a marvel with a gash-fiddle or a both-ways tommy—a cross-cut saw and a two-edged ax.

The days passed, the snow melted away and more snow fell. A clear, bright Sunday came. Immediately after the camp's noonday meal, Slim Jack dressed himself in new corduroys, put on a new black tie, and went down Bad Ax Creek to call on Hallie Porter. Within an hour he was back, and he looked as blue as a bottle of ink. I guessed that the girl had once more refused to renew diplomatic relations with him, so to speak, and I couldn't see why.

When Slim Jack returned, I was sitting alone on the boarding-house porch, smoking. The sunshine was almost warm. Bewley came to me, asked for a match and lighted his pipe, and dropped to a chair beside mine.

"What's eating you?" I let out.

"She wouldn't even speak to me," said Bewley; then he turned a little red, for he hadn't meant to say that.

"Tell me all about it, Slim Jack," I said sympathetically. "Perhaps I can suggest something."

Bewley took his pipe from his teeth and looked to see that there wasn't anybody to overhear. Satisfied, he faced back to me.

"I'm desperate enough to do it," he muttered. "And human enough. But I sure want you to keep it to yourself. Here it is, all of it:

"Hallie's people and mine began to fight on sight at the close of the Civil War. The low-down McMasterses was what you might call dogs for anybody that would run with them; they carried tales that

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kept the feud alive and hot. Since I was a kid I've l-loved Hallie, and she's both loved and hated me for the same length of time—hated me because my name was Bewley. It's hard to make you understand this, I reckon. I ain't sure I understand it myself. But it's just like I'm tellin' you.

"Well, I came home on a visit from the Big Santee a month ago. No letters ever got to me down there, so it was a surprise to find that Grizzly McMasters had killed my one brother while I was gone. The court at Johnsville had tried McMasters, as my people had decided to be law-abidin' in regards to the matter, and he had come clear on a plea o' self-defense. But about the time I got home from the Big Santee, McMasters' main witness fell off o' a cliff close to the cabin of a Bewley, and hurt himself bad. He confessed to this Bewley, afore he died, all about the quarrel between my brother and Grizzly. This is the way it was:

"Grizzly was high, low, jack and the game, at a loggin'-camp on the Blackfern, and my brother worked there too. Plumb bad blood was between 'em, and my brother carried a pistol to protect himself; McMasters was so much the biggest, you see. One night Grizzly unloaded my brother's little gun on the sly, and soon the next mornin' he picked a quarrel, callin' Jimmy bad names no real man could take. Jimmy was hotheaded. He drawed his pistol. Out came Grizzly's gun, and my brother snapped his pistol. Then Grizzly fired.

"Woods," Slim Jack went on, lowering his voice, "my business here is to kill McMasters in self-defense, by beatin' him to the draw. I carry a stub-nosed automatic with the safety off, and I'm blue lightnin' with it. There's no chance o' the law makin' him pay the penalty now. There was only one man, and that one man a Bewley, that heard the witness' confession; besides, McMasters has already been 'once in jeopardy.'

"But Grizzly is wise to me, and I don't know what I'm goin' to do. He won't carry a gun. He won't even carry a knife, or fight me barehanded. I've tried him lots o' times. He simply looks sick and walks off."

That last, I knew, was true. I had taken notice of it myself. When McMasters saw Bewley coming, he simply walked off, and always he reminded me of a big, frightened black dog. The fear of death was on the man.

I couldn't suggest any way out of the difficulties that beset Slim Jack, and I said so. He didn't appear to be disappointed; he had told me his story because it somehow relieved the tension, and because he thought he could trust me. We rose, knocked our pipes empty, and went up-stairs and to the sleeping-quarters of the Bad Ax logging crew.

When Slim Jack Bewley and I approached the stove, Grizzly McMasters moved away. Yes, the fear of death was on the man.

A little before the middle of the next morning, Superintendent Flagler and I were pulling a gash-fiddle through a big poplar to warm ourselves, when the camp's cook ran up through the snow.

"Nothin' for dinner!" he said half-breathlessly. "Commissary ain't open. I pounded on the door, and banged on the door, and nothin' doin'!"

"Funny," said the super. "Old Bildad's drunk, maybe. I'll go down with you and see. Want to go along, Woods?"

I did. Half an hour later the three of us drew up before the big, rough-board door of the commissary. The Crooked Creek superintendent was standing there rapping loudly, and behind him stood his cook. The Bad Ax super, as hotheaded a man as ever lived, seized a length of round cordwood from the snow and struck the door with an end of it, breaking the latch. The five of us entered.

At the back of the commissary building, a small room had been built to serve as the quarters of the clerk. To the door of this room we went; it was not fastened, and the Crooked Creek super opened it and walked in. Flagler and I followed at his heels, and no man of us was prepared for the sight that greeted our eyes. My two burly companions swore gravely, and I—well, my teeth chattered.

THE small iron safe which the company had sent out to Old Bildad stood with its door wide open, and Old Bildad lay sprawled face downward on the floor. He had gone to his last account, and a bullet-hole through and through his body told us of the method of his departure.

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"We must touch nothing else," Superintendent Flagler muttered suddenly; then we left the room.

When the two cooks had been given the supplies they needed, we went out of the building and closed the door. The cooks hastened away, and Flagler turned to the Crooked Creek man.

"Jameson, better send that little saddle-tank locomotive of yours empty to Johnsville for the sheriff." He faced me. "Woods, I'll have to ask you to stand guard here; don't let anybody enter, and keep people away from the building on all sides, until the sheriff comes. I'll send a man to help you, for there may be a crowd here pretty soon. The moment I can get away, I'll be back myself."

"Send Bewley, if it's all the same to you," I requested.

From the front door of the commissary, beaten paths ran both northward and southward in the snow; elsewhere around the building the white blanket had been disturbed almost none. My feet were cold, and I at once took up a beat around the commissary, keeping always more than ten feet from the walls. Before I had reached a point opposite the one window of McWhorter's little room, I saw that two of the four panes had been broken out. Five more steps, and I found that a double line of footprints ran at an angle from a point beneath the window to the path that led to the southward.

The same person had made both lines, and—that person was Hallie Porter! I knew it because she was the one woman in that country who wore even moderately high-heeled shoes. She had tramped the snow down slightly under the window, I noted, before she had turned to go back.

I wished very heartily for Bewley. He arrived when I had gone around the building half a dozen times. No crowd had begun to gather as yet, and I hurried him to the tell-tale footprints.

"This looks bad, Slim Jack," said I.

I didn't have to tell him whose they were. He knew them instantly. I saw him go almost a clean white.

Then he straightened and faced me.

"She never done it, Woods. Flagler said the safe was robbed. If she could ha' forced herself to kill a man, she wouldn't ha' even thought o' robbery. The person who done it forced Old Bildad to open the safe at a pistol's point, forced him to fork over the money, and then shot him to keep him from tellin'——"

Time was precious, and I interrupted:

"Neither do I believe she did it, but what will a judge and a jury say about it? There are a number of people who know of that affair between Old Bildad and Hallie's father, and it is sure to come out. With all this evidence against the girl, the law will hardly try to find the real murderer."

"Dead right," mumbled Bewley.

A sudden brightness shone from his topaz-brown eyes. Then he stepped into Hallie's footprints and walked to the window and very thoroughly tramped the snow there, turned and walked back to the beaten path, turned there and came back to the narrow path I had made. He had entirely obliterated the girl's footprints, and left his own in their places! And his boots had soles of a shape not common in those mountains.

When he had reached me, he smiled.

"Woods," he said, "don't you never, never tell. This is my test of you as a friend."

His quick heroism almost took my breath away. I reached out and got one of his hands and shook it awkwardly.

"Slim Jack," said I, "I'm glad I know you. It will make me very proud when I think back over this part of my insignificant life and remember that I knew you."

"I'd better go now," he told me, "and lose myself somewhere out in the world. It's just as well, I reckon; Hallie would never marry me, anyway. Woods, you've been a pretty good pal, and I hate to tell you good-by. Don't forget—you mustn't never tell!"

Well, the sheriff came, made investigations, deputized two men and with them tried to trail Jackson Bewley. But Bewley had kept the beaten ways, single rails of logging-roads, and creeks, and the officer and deputies returned without a prisoner.

Flagler asked me to take over the commissary for two weeks, and I consented.

One of those weeks went by, and I had noticed two things in particular. Grizzly McMasters was rid of the fear of death, and boiling over with a rude, noisy happiness; and Hallie Porter was the one grown person in the country about the Little Pigeon who had not been to the commissary since the passing of McWhorter.

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But on the Wednesday of my second week as clerk, Hallie came. Her countenance held a beauty that I had not seen there before; a dramatic sort of desperation was in it, and there was a sadness in it too. Nobody else was in the commissary, and Hallie half-fearfully asked—

"Mr. Woods, how do they know that Jack Bewley killed Old Bildad?"

"They found his tracks leading to McWhorter's window and back, and he—er, he ran away," I said. "The fact that he ran made strong evidence against him, you know."

"Did they find any other footprints leadin' to that window?"

"No," I answered promptly. "Other footprints had been there, but Slim Jack had walked in them, tramped them out and left his own, which was to keep suspicion from—from you, Miss Porter."

Her eyes became wide.

"Did *he* think I killed Old Bildad?"

"No. But he thought you would be arrested, tried for the murder and convicted, and he wished to save you."

"And now he's gone!" She was very pale. "I didn't know," she continued after a moment, "about the footprints. Uncle didn't tell me that. No, I didn't do it, Mr. Woods. Uncle had sent me to the commissary the evenin' before, which was Sunday evenin', for tobacco; he said I might possibly find it open. But it wasn't. I knocked, and had no answer. I had started home, when I thought o' goin' to Old Bildad's window; I thought I ought to be able to rouse him by knockin' on the window. There was two broken panes. I called and called, and had no answer."

Just then two mountaineer boys came in, and we had to leave off our talk. Hallie bought a few small articles in the way of groceries, and went homeward.

THAT afternoon we received word that Slim Jack Bewley had been caught somewhere in North Carolina, and was being brought to Johnsville to await trial. Early on the following morning, Hallie came to me with this:

"I'm not goin' to let Slim Jack suffer. If I can't find out who really done it, I'll go to Johnsville and give myself up. You'll be my witness, Mr. Woods, and you won't tell a lie."

I had expected that she would arrive at that very conclusion, therefore I wasn't surprised. To catch the real criminal—that had been an idea of my own, since Bewley had been arrested, now that so much depended upon catching the real criminal. I suggested a process of elimination for a beginning, and Hallie agreed. Our suspects came down to four, with Grizzly McMasters at the top of the list.

Together we went carefully over the scene of the murder, and we found more than the sheriff had found; but he had had no reason for searching closely. Most of the pieces of the broken window-panes lay on the outside, which told us that the glass had been broken from the inside; and a half-demolished chair spoke eloquently of a struggle.

With my knife, I dug from one of the walls a bullet which showed us that McWhorter had been killed with a revolver of .45 caliber. A little reasoning told us that the murderer had been admitted by McWhorter himself. You see, the commissary's front door was equipped with a strong night-latch that locked with the closing of the door.

"Who," I asked, "would Old Bildad have been most likely to have for a visitor on a Sunday evening?"

It was rather a foolish question, but Hallie hit a bull's-eye in her answer:

"The man who went halfers with Old Bildad in the whisky-sellin'," she said, "and that's Grizzly McMasters. I happen to know that, Mr. Woods. And—I'd bet my life he's the man that killed Old Bildad."

"But proving it!" I exclaimed.

For a few minutes Hallie gave herself up to hard thinking, and I didn't interrupt her. Then she faced me again.

"You can do anything," she said, "when you've got to do it. Grizzly is the man. I know it. And now I've got to prove it, which will save Slim Jack and settle his account with Grizzly at the same time. That will make me even with Slim Jack, too; I'll be squarin' up with him, too."

Before another day had passed, she had an idea. McMasters had quit work on the pretense of having injured his shoulder, and he began to loaf at the commissary. We had to have another man in the girl's scheme, and we chose Superintendent Flagler. He entered willingly, and everything was ready on Saturday morning. It

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was to be pulled off in the company's store.

McMasters was there, as usual; and, as usual, he had been drinking. He bought a pound of red-striped stick candy—he seemed pretty well heeled with funds, for a timberjack—and sat down beside the stove to eat it. Suddenly I asked if he'd mind keeping store in my place for the rest of the morning. He sat up on his soap-box with a kind of serious, drunken dignity.

"Shore," he drawled. "I'm a straight feller, Woods. I'm a straight feller."

"Of course," I replied; then I hurried away.

When I had been gone ten minutes, Hallie entered. Luckily, only the two of them were in the commissary. McMasters leaped behind the counter, and leered across it:

"I'm the clerk this mornin'. What is it?"

The girl bought a small package of something. McMasters caught her hand in his, and she smiled and didn't withdraw it.

"Hon, marry me, and le's go to town to live," he pleaded. "Will ye? I'd take them rags off o' ye, and put reel clo'es on ye, Hon. I'd buy ye lots o' purty things, too, rings and bracelets and things."

His bearded, brutish face was very close to her face, and his wicked black eyes bored into her eyes. She withdrew her hand.

"How could I ever marry anybody but Slim Jack Bewley?" she said.

"But he's in jail," frowned McMasters. "And afore it's over with, he'll be hung by the neck, neck, neck, ontel he's dead, dead, dead."

"Maybe so," Hallie murmured. "But didn't he pay my debt for me, one I couldn't pay myself? And if I couldn't marry him for that, and him lovin' me like he does, ought I ever to marry anybody else?"

"Which debt?" uncertainly.

"You know what Bildad McWhorter done to my father, don't you?" very seriously. "Robbed him, and betrayed him—the Judas! And sent him to the penitentiary; and he took sick there, and came home and died! Ain't that a debt, for a Porter—a Porter? If it ain't, what is a debt?"

"You mean he—Slim Jack—killed Old Bildad and paid up for ye?"

"What else!" clipped Hallie. Note how the girl avoided a direct lie.

Most of the great strength of McMasters, of course, lay below his eyes.

"Maybe," he said, "it wasn't Bewley that done it."

Hallie Porter stared as though she didn't quite understand.

"Maybe," McMasters went on, "it was me."

"Prove that it was you," Hallie replied spiritedly, "and take me! Marry me; take me where you want to take me; beat me; make me your dog!"

He eyed her hard for a long minute. She faced him steadfastly.

"Wait here," said McMasters.

Hallie agreed. McMasters went out, and hastened up the northward trail and to the point at which it crossed Bad Ax Creek. After a moment of looking carefully through the woodland about him, he stole from the edge of the stream some fifty yards, and there unearthed something which he quickly hid under his coat.

When he returned to Hallie, he opened one of the commissary's glass fruit-jars and showed her more than eleven hundred dollars in gold, bank-notes and silver. Most of it had been McWhorter's.

"What more proof do ye want?" said he.

Still she appeared to be unconvinced.

"How do I know it was Old Bildad's?"

From the sheaf of bank-notes, McMasters took a check of Superintendent Flagler's, which had been drawn to McWhorter.

"Read that!" he said triumphantly.

She read it, and smiled a glorious smile.

"That's pretty good proof," said she. "But—one other thing: will you swear, before God, that you killed Old Bildad?"

He raised his right hand in a manner meant to be strikingly dramatic, and said with the same brand of serious, drunken dignity that I had noticed in him shortly before.

"I shore do."

The door to the clerk's quarters banged open, and Flagler and I covered Grizzly McMasters with shotguns borrowed from the commissary. His peculiar dignity fell from him like a rope. He looked a curse at Hallie Porter.

"I didn't lie," she told him. "Take me, take me if you can."

She went with us to Johnsville; and before she left the little town she was the happy wife of the happy man who had been the champion fighter of the Big Santee. The rest of the Bewleys? Oh, they made a pet of her.

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For The Flag

A Four-Part Story

Part I.

by Thomas Addison

Author of "The Boss of Powderville," "G 2—Defective," etc.

CHAPTER I

STRUCK DOWN

WHEN Fate pulls the strings of human destinies the little puppets at the end of them move in sublime ignorance of the superior force they are called to serve. They imagine that it is of their own free will they come and go, and do and don't do.

And this was the case of Mr. James Perry, Jr., of Norfolk, Virginia. But recently out of bed from an attack of pneumonia it was, so Jimmy thought, to escape the chill winds of March that he set sail on a big white steamship for Southern waters; in reality he was simply responding to the lead-string he was on. For Jimmy, all unaware to himself, had been chosen to assist in the puncturing of a German plot that was being hatched in Central America with the express purpose of heaping up trouble for his Uncle Samuel.

It was on Monday of the first week of April in the third year of the great war. Jimmy, after twelve days of idle voyaging from port to port, decided to quit the ship at Puerto Mono in the Republic of Zanhoria—a country that can not be found on the map for the very excellent reason that it is otherwise named there. Jimmy was already nearly as good as new, thanks to healing saline breezes, and he wanted to see something of the interior of this jungle-land he was coasting by. He appealed to the purser for a stopover, and took train for Cortina, the seat of government, four slow hours away.

When he had left behind the smelly littoral and climbed through a spectroscopic panorama of flowered hills and plains, and vast reaches of wonderful hardwood forests, to the great plateau between seas the tonic air swept Jimmy's lungs whole and clean as a willow whistle. He felt fit to hold his own with man or devil; and yet, barring a felonious rap on the head that stretched him out for some unconsidered minutes, it was to neither man nor devil he fell a victim on that self-same night. It was to a girl, and of his own breed—a girl in a lead as compelling as was his, and as unguessed.

THE girl had made ready for bed. It was eleven o'clock, and the heart of the city, a dozen squares away, was slowing in its beat. The girl, white-robed, her bare feet slipped into a pair of dainty sandals, her hair in a massive murrey-brown braid thrown forward over a slim shoulder, stood at her darkened window in the Calle Dolores looking out on the soft purple night. It was one of the infrequent two-story residences to be found in this volcanic center of the world. Below lay a little public park. In the day it presented a colorful riot of tropic plants,

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but now only splashes of pale tints showed within the radius of the low-voltage electric lamp placed where the paths from the street corners met and crossed.

It was very still, a breathless night. Even the unquiet palms in the park had ceased their whisperings for the time. The girl sighed drearily. The florid charms of this far country had palled on her long since. She was turning from the window when a man's white-flanneled figure loomed from the shadows of the park into the outer rays of the sentinel lamp.

Something in the way he carried himself caught her attention, and she lingered to watch him. No native walked in such a free-gaited, upstanding way as this. He was not hurrying. He was strolling leisurely along, his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth. As he came into better view she could see that he was a young man, tall, with shoulders of an enviable breadth. A tourist—an American, perhaps—ill-advisedly wandering alone about the city in its evil hours.

He was passing now a thicket of poinsettias that bordered the path. As the girl looked an arm shot out from the thicket, and the young man staggered, and sagged down in an inert heap. Hands reached forth greedily and dragged the limp form in under the canopy of blood-red leaves. Not a sound save the dull rasping of the man's body on the gravel had broken the stillness.

The girl at the window was frozen with the horror of the thing she had witnessed. She had tried to cry out, but her voice would not come at first. Now it broke from her in a piercing scream.

Below, in the wide hall of the house, a silver-haired man who sat dozing over a book, gathered himself unsteadily to his feet. His tall, meager frame shook as with an ague.

"Good God!" he jerked out, and stood listening.

There was no repetition of the cry, and he plunged to the stairs, shouting hoarsely as he went:

"Winifred! Winifred! What has happened?"

He was half-way up the stairs, dragging heavily at the rail, when the girl came speeding toward him. She had tarried only long enough to girdle a kimono over her filmy nightdress. But she had herself in hand now, though her voice was not quite even when she spoke.

"Some one has been waylaid in the park. We must go to him, father."

A rushing expression of relief crossed the other's face. It was as though an undefined and stupid fear had been brushed away. He slewed around and descended the stairs. Winifred was already down. Her eye took note of his spotted skin and halting step. Her mouth tightened.

"The man may be dying," she said tensely. "If you feel that you are not able to go, say so, please."

"It's not that," he disclaimed. "Only—there's the police. Why not telephone——"

She did not wait for him to finish, but ran to the door. Her arms flashed ivory white from the flowing kimono sleeves as she threw it wide. Then she was gone.

"Winny!" her father called. "For heaven's sake——"

He pulled himself together, and followed after her. As he neared the door his foot caught on a rug, and he pitched to the floor.

Winifred's scream had brought a man questing up the street. She almost bunted into him as she shot out of the house.

"*Qué hay?*" he demanded trenchantly.

She stammered a word of explanation in faulty Spanish, and they hurried side by side into the park. They came upon Jimmy Perry stretched on his back under the poinsettia bushes. His senses were slowly returning, and he blinked at them in mild perplexity as they drew him forth into the light and raised him to a sitting posture. Was this small, charming creature bending over him an image of his bruised fancy, or was she indeed living flesh? He could feel a rounded arm supporting his head, and the rise and fall of a firm young bosom against his shoulder. She was real!

"By Jove!" he whispered wonderingly. And again, and louder as his voice gained in strength—"By Jove!"

Winifred took her arm away with a certain dispatch—the man with her had the patient now in a very adequate hold.

"You were attacked," she explained, her dark eyes soft with pity. "I saw it from my window."

She gave a sudden little cry. There was a red stain on her arm.

"Your head! Are you badly hurt?"

Jimmy put his hand to the wound. It

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was smeared and sticky when he brought it away. But he smiled reassuringly.

"I have loving friends who say it's solid ivory," he pronounced. "Shows how your friends can get you wrong."

Brown eyes smiled into blue. Winifred warmed to this light-hearted stranger. And he was from "home"; his manner of speech told her that much. Jimmy sat forward, disdaining further support from the swarthy young man at his side, though he thanked him with a nod.

"Do you know," he remarked, "I saw that chap scoot in here ahead of me. A mulatto—*mestizo* is the word, isn't it? I was out for the air before turning in, and didn't pay him any particular attention; just thought he was in a hurry to get home, or something." He grinned at them humorously. "It seems I went to sleep a bit sooner than I'd counted on. But I'm all awake now. May I get up and introduce myself?"

"Permit me?" said the young man politely.

DESPITE Jimmy's protests he helped him to his feet, and held to him for a moment. It was fortunate as otherwise Jimmy would have plunged incontinently head first at the girl.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I hadn't an idea I was so wabbly. My name is James Perry. I'm from Virginia, and your debtor—and yours, sir—a thousand times."

Her hand went out to him with a little eager motion which was as instantly checked, and it met his in a wholly conventional clasp.

"Of course you are American," he cried joyously. "And from my section. I knew that at once—the minute you spoke."

She colored under his gaze, acutely conscious now of her attire. But she said gravely:

"My name is Winifred Brewer. And this gentleman—we met on the same errand——"

"I am Enrique Segovia, delighted to have been of the slightest service," said the young man in excellent English, but with a bow entirely Latin. "If I may offer the suggestion," he went on, "it might be well to give Mr. Perry's wound some attention. It is bleeding rather freely."

It was so, and Jimmy's collar was in a sad muss. He found his handkerchief and clapped it to the spot.

"You must come into the house," urged Winifred. "It is close by. You may be in need of a doctor. Mr. Segovia——"

"I've got him," he responded promptly. "Better not try it alone," he cautioned Jimmy. "You might get a fall."

Jimmy would have laughed at him and stepped out unaided; but the girl had taken him by the other arm, and was slipping her hand under it solicitously. He discovered of a sudden that there were pleasures in this mode of locomotion he would be foolish to forego. And he found when they moved off that he really was a trifle queer in his legs. It was passing, though.

The door of the house stood wide as Winifred had left it. As they came up her father appeared in it, silhouetted against the light within. He advanced to meet them, limping a little. Aside from this his fall seemed to have steadied him. His daughter, as she took account of him, inhaled deeply a breath of relief.

"I was coming, Winny," he said with a note of apology that escaped the others, "but I tripped on a confounded rug and went down. Is the gentleman much hurt?"

Jimmy answered for himself.

"Just a tap on the head, sir. A joke if it had happened on the grid. I'm entirely all right, only these good Samaritans won't believe it."

They went in, Brewer last. He shut the door, and scrutinized his guest. Jimmy had disengaged himself from his guides. He stood smiling cheerfully on them all to show that he was his own man again.

"You are from the States!" ejaculated Brewer.

His eyes were intent and questioning. Winifred spoke.

"Mr. James Perry of Virginia, father. And Mr. Enrique Segovia——"

She stopped, smothered in a wave of dismay. Her father had put out a groping hand to a chair and was clinging to it—drunkenly, she thought. She went to him with leaden feet.

"You are ill, father?" Her voice was low and lifeless.

"That fall. It has shaken me," he muttered. "If these gentlemen will excuse me I will go to my room."

"By all means, sir," put in Jimmy

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quickly. "Miss Brewer, positively I am quite myself again. I'm ashamed to have imposed on you so."

The girl turned a distressed look on the young man, but did not speak. Segovia came to the rescue.

"I trust Mr. Brewer will find himself fully restored by morning," he said. "I will see Mr. Perry to his hotel. Do not fear for him."

She made no reply except for a slight motion of her head. They bowed, and took their leave. Winifred had her father by the arm, and they were moving toward the stairs. The man seemed old and broken before his time.

Jimmy stood on the step for an instant puzzling over what had just passed. There was a wrong note somewhere, but he could not put his finger on it. He was aroused by Segovia's hand cupping his elbow.

"Come," he advised. "We shall find a cab in the Calle Central. I was on my way from there when I heard Miss Brewer's cry. You are staying, I suppose, at the Europa, on the plaza. Everybody does."

Jimmy gave a short laugh.

"Yes. But about this cab, my friend. I think I'll walk. I find that I've been picked bare. Watch, money, steamer ticket—everything gone!"

Segovia made a little clucking sound of commiseration.

"Too bad, but we will see what can be done. I am not unfavorably regarded by Don Emilio Ortega, State Superintendent of Police. We will drive to headquarters. Look here," he interjected abruptly, "I've been trying to place you, and I have. You are the Jimmy Perry that captained the Virginia University eleven in '15."

Jimmy came to a sudden stand.

"The deuce! I say, where——"

"I was '16, Virginia Polytechnic. Just a rooter. You did us up good and plenty——"

"That accounts for it—your English," broke in Jimmy. "You had me guessing where you got it. By George, old man, this is luck! I don't mind riding on you now. And a cablegram home—I'll stand you up for that. I've got to make a touch for another roll."

They went on, laughing their pleasure in the rare discovery they had made. By tacit consent they avoided reference to the scene they had witnessed. Presently Segovia asked:

"Do I remember reading in the papers that James Perry, Sr., was one of those that were stung in the Bowman affair in Richmond—William Bowman, real-estate operator? The chap who absconded with a quarter of a million last Fall?"

"You do," said Jimmy. "Bowman took sixty thousand out of dad. And I could have used it," he added mournfully. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering," returned Segovia carelessly. "I fancied I'd read about it. Here's the Calle Central, and there's a cab."

CHAPTER II

THE CONSPIRACY

"SHE'S fine, just fine, and plucky as they make 'em—running out there in her pretty bare feet to help she didn't know who. I'll send her some flowers, by George, and follow them up while they're fresh."

Thus Jimmy to himself as he stood shaving the bristles from a square-set jaw in his room on the top floor of the Hotel Europa the next morning. The building boasted three steel stories in defiance of possible seismic overturnings, and was modern throughout—a credit to the Paris of the Tropics, as Cortina modestly styled itself.

With the pleasing mission he had arranged for himself in mind Jimmy shaved carefully down one side of his face, then down the other, and met and defeated the array of cross-grained bristles under his chin without a scratch from the encounter. It was not the face of an Adonis the glass revealed. No one had ever threatened to exterminate Jimmy for his good looks, but he made his way against the lack of them by a devil-may-care straightforwardness that landed him high in the esteem of men and compelled the attention of women.

Jimmy had slept late—it was, in fact, nearly twelve—and he was now arisen in the fulness of his strength. A fussy little police surgeon had patched his head up with court-plaster the night before, and except for a certain soreness to the touch the wound bothered him not at all. It scarcely showed under his thick thatch

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of tawny hair. He washed the remains of the lather from his face and sat down to the coffee and rolls he had ordered sent up. Segovia came in as he was finishing.

The Zanhorian was a well-knit young fellow, and rather above the average height of his race. What Jimmy missed in manly pulchritude his newly-acquired friend possessed in plenteous measure. He was decidedly handsome. His full name and title, as Jimmy had learned, was Señor Don Enrique Maria Santiago Segovia y Valera, and he was a lieutenant of engineers in the national army.

"Some bug," Jimmy had allowed to himself, and proceeded forthwith to call him by his Christian name, to the other's reciprocal pleasure.

"I waited as long as I could," said Segovia. "Are you rested?"

As he spoke he glanced narrowly about the room.

"Rested, ready and reckless," Jimmy grinned at him. "Start something and see."

Segovia gave him a veiled smile in return.

"Perhaps I can do it." He motioned to a connecting door on his left. "Any one in there?"

"I haven't heard any one," replied Jimmy, a little mystified by his manner.

"Let us make sure." Segovia stepped out into the hall. He was back in a moment. "The room is not occupied," he announced, and took a seat across the table from Jimmy.

His face was composed in grave lines.

"I say, Enrique, why this *Arsène Lupin* business?" Jimmy queried. "What are you going to spring on me?"

Segovia selected a cigaret from the box Jimmy had shoved over to him. He lit it, exhaled leisurely, and said—

"Your President delivered his war message to the Congress last night."

Jimmy's expression grew serious.

"That was expected," he commented. "Well, I'm ready to do my bit."

The young Zanhorian's brilliant black eyes studied him thoughtfully.

"Suppose you could do it here, Jimmy? Suppose you could put in a stroke for your country that would count for a lot more—right away—than just shouldering a gun in a training-camp?"

"What's that? I don't get you, old chap." Jimmy stared at him.

Segovia's answer only heightened the enigma. It was characteristically Latin. He took from his pocket Jimmy's watch and steamer ticket, and laid them on the table.

"They rounded up your man, one Juan Lopez, late last night," he imparted. "Drunk, and your money gone — in monte and mescal—but they recovered these."

"By Godfrey, it's more than I hoped for," exclaimed Jimmy in pleased surprise. "Thanks, old chap. Now when I get my cable I'll be fixed."

"I have told you that you have only to command me for your needs," said Segovia quietly.

"Thanks again, Enrique. You are the best ever, but there's a limit, you know. And I'll be hearing in the course of the day; if I don't I'll hunt up our minister here. To get back to what you were saying—something I could do."

"This is in line with it," the other stated, his voice guarded now. "Don Emilio Ortega called me up this morning, and I dropped around to see him. He had been talking with this Lopez, and to save himself from a long imprisonment Lopez gave information which may turn out to be of marked value to the State, and to your people at Washington. Sounds a little singular, doesn't it, coming from a drunken half-breed?"

Jimmy expelled a cloud of cigaret smoke under cover of which he endeavored to conceal his impatience.

"Go on. I'm all ears," he said sententiously.

"It's like this," Segovia began. "There are underground influences at work to stir up trouble between Zanhoria and the United States of America. It's a long story, and I won't go into it now; but the plot is well laid, and liberally financed."

"Ha! Germany!" ejaculated Jimmy.

Segovia nodded.

"We suspect her. The thing is to prove it."

"Well!" Jimmy leaned forward eagerly.

"I should tell you," proceeded his friend, "that my uncle, Don Luis Valera, is President Hurango's Secretary of State; so my facts, so far as they go, are first-hand. It was to my uncle's house I was on my way last night when my good fortune led me to you. I live with him."

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"Um," grunted Jimmy. "Now I understand your pull. But how does this half-breed Lopez fit into an international plot? It's a comedy touch that gets by me."

"IT'S a piece of absolute good luck," Segovia asserted earnestly. He went on after a pause. "President Hurango suspects certain persons—they stand high, some of them—but he has had nothing tangible to act on. Well, Lopez, we think, has overcome that obstacle."

Segovia reached for another cigaret, and lit it with calm deliberation.

"For heaven's sake get on!" Jimmy adjured him. "Or are you doing this on purpose?"

"Lopez," continued Segovia equably, "tells of a house where his wife is cook, and he himself does odd jobs about the place. The owner is a banker, but his name is not yet on the President's suspect list. It seems, however, that his home is the rendezvous for the conspirators. Lopez, of course, hasn't an idea of what all this portends; he merely knows that mysterious meetings are being held, and he hopes his information will interest the police and thus win favor for himself."

Jimmy looked his disappointment at this apparent anti-climax.

"Oh, I say, Enrique," he objected, "aren't you a bit too credulous in this? It isn't likely a gang of conspirators would subject themselves to the espionage of a servant. It sounds fishy to me."

Segovia disposed of this with a shrug.

"They don't take him into account. He gets his bread and meat there. A dog doesn't quarrel with his bone."

"But he's doing it!"

"I've explained that."

"But," insisted Jimmy, "these 'mysterious meetings.' They may be simple business conferences. It's nothing unusual—not in my country—for a man's business associates to gather at his house."

"After midnight?" Segovia lifted his brows.

"Eh? What?"

"And when one of the men answers to the description of Herr Adolph Kaufman, the German Minister?"

Jimmy whistled softly.

"Oh! That's different."

"It is a delicate situation, you perceive, with Herr Kaufman injected into it," observed Segovia. "Zanhoria is not at war with Germany. Her envoy is under our protection; we can't ask for his recall on a mere suspicion. In the meantime the damage will be done."

"I'd like to strangle him," growled Jimmy.

Enrique gave him an odd smile.

"As you a moment ago so intelligently remarked, my friend—that's different."

Jimmy sat up very straight in his chair.

"What do you mean?"

"We have a proverb in my tongue," said Segovia with slow precision, "which says: 'An enemy is an enemy wherever you find him.' "

Jimmy regarded him intently.

"Hang it all, Enrique," he burst forth, "I'm not a mind-reader. What do you want me to do? Not walk up to this man with my flag in one hand and a gun in the other, and blow his head off. Hardly that, I imagine."

Segovia laughed.

"Hardly, though I'd be glad to lay a wreath of stinkweed on his bier."

"Then what?" demanded Jimmy. "You are leading up to something in your confounded exasperating way. Spit it out!"

The Zanhorian brushed an ash delicately from his sleeve before replying.

"It's a thing to be considered, Jimmy. The idea only came to me on my way here. But you can see, can you not, that with Herr Kaufman eliminated the plot would fall through?"

"I can see a whole lot of things when they're pointed out to me," snorted Jimmy. "You want me to eliminate Kaufman. How, short of murder?"

"If he could be—detained, let us call it; in some retired place for a few days——"

"Kidnaped! Say it!" blurted out Jimmy.

Segovia showed a row of fine white teeth.

"If it pleases you—kidnaped, abducted, spirited away, made a prisoner of war; anything you wish, my friend, so that it succeeds. I am speaking wholly in my capacity as a well-taxed citizen, understand? As an officer and the nephew of the secretary of state I frown on the proceeding."

Jimmy returned his grin. He pushed back his chair, got up, and took a turn about the room. The proposition appealed to him, altogether irregular though it was. On the one side he would be putting in a stroke for his country, as Segovia had

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termed it, that would undoubtedly relieve it of a grave embarrassment; on the other side, the thing tickled his fancy, for the spirit of adventure was strong in him. He brought up before the Spaniard.

"I'm game. But if I run foul of your police? What then? They'd be obliged to protect Kaufman."

"Our police, I regret to say, are notably inefficient," murmured Segovia. "Don Emilio himself deplores it."

Jimmy picked up his watch from the table and dropped it in his pocket.

"I've noticed they are pretty slow," he chuckled. "Well, what's your plan, old man? I'll do my best, but my Spanish walks on crutches—classroom patter mostly."

Segovia put this aside as negligible.

"DON'T worry, Jimmy. You will find that the better class here talks English very well. We teach it in the schools. It is only in your own story-books of these Southern countries that a latter day native gentleman addresses the English-speaking traveler in bad Spanish. And," he added a trifle warmly, "it is only in these same books that we are set down *in toto* as grafters, concession hucksters, and political bandits.

"There are some of us who are patriots, who have their country's best welfare at heart, and who are striving to lift a half-wild lower class to the plane of civilized citizenship. We can't all be bought, and we are not all comic-opera characters."

He stood up a little abruptly, ashamed of his uncalled-for outburst.

"As for that last," laughed Jimmy soothingly, "I can show you in our revered halls of Congress at home some of the niftiest comic opera performers you ever paid two dollars a seat to see. But about that plan of yours——"

"I haven't one as yet, except that I shall hand in my resignation from the army so that I may have the freedom of a private citizen. Suppose you dine with me tonight. I shall have hit on something by then, perhaps. Who knows?"

"Tonight?" Jimmy hesitated. "I was thinking of paying a call tonight. Oh, hang it, you understand. On Miss Brewer. It's only civil, you know, after what she did. And she's my countrywoman."

Segovia walked over to the window and looked out on the plaza.

"Miss Brewer, I observed last night, did not mention her residence in the States," he said without turning.

"What the dickens are you driving at now?" whipped out Jimmy peevishly.

"You are from Virginia—Norfolk. Do you recall anything singular in her father's manner when you were introduced to him?" asked Segovia. He kept his place at the window.

"Well?"

"And do you recall my inquiry about the William Bowman affair when we were in the street again?"

"Good Lord! You don't mean! I say, Enrique!" Jimmy's voice was startled.

Segovia went on.

"Don Emilio tells me that Mr. Walter Brewer is from Richmond. That he came here via New Orleans in November last. That his daughter joined him two months later. That he has noted as a curious fact that when men change their names they stick to the old initials. And that, finally though Zanhoria has no extradition treaty with the United States the International Detective Bureau sent here, in the routine of business, a picture of Bowman. Allowing for the mustache Bowman wore the likeness is complete. And there's a five-thousand-dollar reward for him. Somebody would bid to finger that, I imagine, if they could get him across the line."

A gulping sound caused him to turn. Jimmy, pale under his tan, was staring at him. Segovia left the window, and went to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I thought, my friend, you ought to know this," he said gently. "The lady is not to blame; she is to be commended. She has sacrificed her world for her father But——"

Jimmy threw his hand off impatiently.

"But what?" he challenged. "She came to me when I was down and out—a stranger—dying, as she thought. God's angel couldn't have done more. Am I to forget that? But, her father is a thief. Granted. Still, he's her father, and she's stuck by him, shared his disgrace, given up her world—you said it—to be with him. A young, lovely girl! It's a beautiful thing, a wonderful thing, and, by Heaven, she shall never learn from me that I know she's any other than Winifred Brewer, daughter of Walter Brewer. I'll have to ask you to make some other date with me, Enrique. I am calling on Miss Brewer tonight."

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"I'm afraid you'll find that a difficult undertaking," Segovia told him quietly. "The house at 140 Calle Dolores is no longer occupied."

"What!" Jimmy's face fell. "Do you mean that Bo—Brewer has cleared out? Overnight?"

"No, this morning. The house is on my way down town. Today as I came up—it was ten o'clock—they were driving off in a touring car loaded with hand luggage. I questioned a servant who was locking up the house. She said they had rented the place ready furnished, but they had been called away suddenly and were not coming back. The car was Brewer's. I've seen him in it before. He has a black man to drive it."

"Where did they go?" demanded Jimmy tensely. "Brewer can't leave the country. Did you ask?"

"Yes. The woman did not know. They left no address."

Jimmy was silent as he dwelt on this. A little frowning knot stood out between his eyes. Presently he said with simple directness:

"Enrique, she needs a friend. This miserable father of hers will wear her heart out dodging every shadow that falls across his path. Can't señor Ortega put me in the way of finding her?"

Segovia answered with ready sympathy.

"We will see him, Jimmy. I rather think he can help. I told him Brewer was gone."

A knock came at the door. Jimmy opened it. A boy tendered him a blue envelope. Jimmy signed for it with a grunt of satisfaction. He read the message, and passed it to Segovia. It ran:

> See Banco Nacional. Come home. Enlist.
> FATHER.

Segovia looked at him, and waited.

"I'll stay, of course," said Jimmy soberly. "I will write dad and explain. And, old man, I got away from myself a moment back. Please understand that this Kaufman business comes first with me. My country above all."

Segovia drew his heels together and saluted.

"I knew it," he asserted. "Jimmy," with a change of tone, "I wouldn't carry an account at the Naçional just now, if I were you. It might be safer elsewhere."

"Why?"

"Because it happens that Señor Morales, president of the Naçional, is the banker, according to Juan's story, at whose house these secret meetings are being held. If he is arrested the bank will likely go into the hands of a receiver, and your money would be tied up."

"The devil!" exclaimed Jimmy explosively. "Well, anyway, this gives me a chance to have a peek at your Señor Morales. For future reference," he grinned.

CHAPTER III

D—VIII—K

THE Hotel Europa was on the south side of the Plaza Central. Directly across from it, in the exact center of the block, was the Banco Naçional. Segovia went with Jimmy to sponsor him at the bank. A handsome automobile was standing at the door as they passed in.

"Señor Morales' car," observed Segovia.

He spoke to a man at the paying-teller's wicket who in turn said something to a young man seated at a desk near by. This person got up and went away, but almost immediately he reappeared, on the outside of the counter now, and implored the privilege of conducting them to Señor Morales' private room.

He led the way to a door at the lower end of the lobby, and tapped on it discreetly. It was opened by the president himself. Jimmy caught sight of a young woman indolently disposed in an armchair by a desk in the center of the room. Then he was swallowed up in Morales' effusive greetings voiced in very passable English.

"I was expecting the pleasure," he babbled. "You are doubly welcome as Señor Segovia's friend. Pray consider me your servant to command."

He drew them in and stood rubbing his hands in fine good humor.

"Permit me, Mr. Perry," he continued volubly, "to give myself the additional pleasure of presenting you to a compatriot, Miss Mary Taylor, the distinguished traveler and author. Miss Taylor, Mr. James Perry of Virginia; Lieutenant Don Enrique Segovia, nephew of his excellency our secretary of state. Miss Taylor," he informed them, "arrived last night from an extended stay in Guatemala. She same down the west coast to Boaco."

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A wonderful pair of sea-blue eyes acknowledged the presentations. They lingered on Segovia. He returned the gaze with a tinge of red shooting up into his dark cheek. She was, he thought, as fair a woman as he had ever looked on, and yet with a strangely boyish air. He perceived the reason for this in the next breath. Her hair was cut short; it was a mass of tender amber curls clinging closely to the shapely head under its jaunty sailor hat.

Miss Taylor, it appeared in the course of the general conversation that followed, was studying the economics of the Central American States for a series of magazine articles she was preparing, and she was eagerly alive to any source of information that would forward her researches.

"It was why I entreated her permission to present you," Morales said to Segovia. "It occurred to me that possibly you would favor Miss Taylor with an introduction to Don Luis, your uncle. He could do much for her."

"Oh, will you?" The blue eyes bathed the young man in their brilliant appeal.

"I shall be charmed," he murmured, and meant it. He experienced a curious little thrill at the prospect.

"You will find Miss Taylor's Spanish most excellent," added the banker. "Zanhoria will have no difficulties for her in that respect."

"I'm a polyglot," the lady laughed. "I have lived abroad a great deal—until this horrible war. I think sometimes it has affected my native tongue."

"That's it!" exclaimed Jimmy, with the air of having solved a riddle. "I have been trying to place your section. Of course I knew you were not from the South."

She smiled at him.

"I saw that you were studying me. I'm from the Northwest—Minnesota." Her smile grew teasing. "And I'm older than I look. You were thinking that, too, dear Mr. Countryman."

Jimmy blushed, but he said straightforwardly—

"Guilty, but at that you wouldn't hang me for my guess."

Her eyes approved him.

"It's the curls. I wear them to save time and trouble in my journeyings. But you have business with Señor Morales, you gentlemen. I am detaining you."

She rose from her chair. Jimmy saw now that she was tall, almost to his own height, and yet without a suspicion of tenuity. A firm, well-molded figure of a woman she was in every line, and redolent of health and energy. Jimmy understood better than at first how she could undertake, unaccompanied, the mission she was on.

Segovia was speaking to her.

"May I not see you to your hotel?" he begged. "On the way we can arrange for an hour that will suit your convenience to meet my uncle."

"Ah, but Miss Taylor is not at a hotel, my dear Lieutenant," interposed the banker with his ever-ready smile. "She is the guest of the Señora Morales, to whom she brought letters from a revered family friend. She is here this morning on matters concerning her traveler's credit, and—was it not, señorita—some *compras*—purchases, I think you call it? The Señora Morales, unhappily, is not well," he added in apology for her absence.

"Just a few toilet articles," said Miss Taylor. "But if Mr. Segovia would not find it a bore——"

Segovia conveyed to her in Spanish his opinion that existence would be barren for him if he were deprived of the pleasure, and they were ushered out by Morales, chattering together like long-lost friends.

"By Jove!" grinned Jimmy to himself. "He never gave me even a look. It was sudden death and destruction at one peep from her eyes. I saw it!"

Morales closed the door on the pair and turned to Jimmy. He was a middle-sized stout person with thick lips and beady eyes, and a head that bulged up into a hairless, glistening dome. He caught the grin on Jimmy's face.

"Ah, you young people," he sighed stagily. "You young people! How wonderful you are! Pray be seated, Mr. Perry. Ah—er—our Norfolk correspondent has instructed us to honor your draft on them up to a thousand dollars. What are your wishes, sir?"

OF A sudden it came to Jimmy who this man was. He had forgotten it for the nonce. He wished he might look through that pile of freshly arrived mail on the desk. Possibly it would disclose secrets Enrique would be glad to learn. He replied to the other's question.

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"Why, I reckon I'll go the limit, sir. I mean," he interpreted as he noted the banker's stare, "that I will draw the thousand."

Morales made out the draft, and Jimmy signed it.

"I will take a hundred in gold, and the rest in paper, please," he said.

The other glanced at him in surprise.

"If you are going to bestow the pleasure of your presence on us here for a time we shall be honored to open an account with you," he remarked. "Perhaps you would find it more convenient, and assuredly safer—if I may be permitted to suggest it—than carrying such a large amount on your person."

Jimmy answered this with a careless laugh.

"Oh, I won't be toting it around with me very long. There are ways of getting rid of it. Last night, for instance, I was cleaned out to my last penny. Enrique had to pay for my cable home. He may have to do it again."

"Ah!"

Morales nodded indulgently. Here was a prodigal son, to be encouraged for the sake of the country. He would find out more about him presently.

"If in the event of a—er—temporary embarrassment I can be of service, Mr. Perry, I beg you to consider me at your command," he offered. "And if you and the Señor Segovia will accept of my poor hospitality at dinner, say Thursday night—with Miss Taylor—I shall be profoundly sensible of your gracious good will," he finished with a flourish.

"Great Cæsar, a chance right out of the box to see the inside of the works!" thought Jimmy. Aloud he said: "I'll be delighted, sir. And Enrique—I accept for him in haste."

He winked at the banker, who responded with a smiling shrug, and pressed a call button on the desk. His hand searched for a handkerchief to mop his face, for they were in the heat of the day and it told on one of a plethoric habit. He seemed to have no special pocket for the article he sought, but he found it finally, and drew it out. In the same moment he wheeled to speak to the clerk who was entering. He handed the man the draft with instructions for cashing it.

Jimmy bent down to recover an envelop that had been whipped out of Morales' pocket with his handkerchief. It had passed through the mail, he observed casually, and was opened. As he picked it up a card slipped from it into his hand. He read what was on it before he was conscious of the act. In fact he could not very well have helped it. There were but six letters:

D—VIII—K

Nothing more was written on either side, as he saw in returning the slip of pasteboard to its cover. And there was nothing else in the envelop. He tendered it to Morales when the latter turned back to him. Less than fifteen seconds had elapsed.

"You dropped this," Jimmy explained, "from your pocket."

An utterly blank look greeted the intelligence. It was succeeded by a queer spasm of the facial muscles which, however, was instantly banished by the ever-serviceable smile.

"Thank you," Morales returned. "It is nothing." To prove it he tore the envelop to bits and cast it into his waste basket.

When Jimmy, a few minutes later, was out in the street he paused, after a step or two, in musing colloquy with himself.

"D—VIII—K. I won't forget that. I could swear the man showed alarm. But what the deuce does it mean? I'll put it up to Enrique, when he comes to from the stroke he's had."

He grinned at the thought of his friend's lightning surrender to the American girl, and went on. He was going to call on his minister, the Honorable John Henry Lane. The address he had looked up in the office of the hotel, and a passer-by, whom he accosted, set him in the right way.

The Legation was in the Calle Commercio, off the northeast corner of the square. It was housed in a low stucco building, with the flag and escutcheon over the door. Farther on he could see the black eagles of the German standard. He noticed, as a little out of the ordinary, that it floated from a high staff standing straight up from the roof, and back from the breast-high parapet in front; it was not canted out over the street in the usual way.

Jimmy felt a tingling at the roots of his hair as he glanced up at his own flag.

"I am with you, Old Glory—to the last gasp," he said softly.

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He marched into the building. A snub-nosed, broad-faced young man was yawning over a week-old New Orleans *Picayune* in the outer office. He scanned Jimmy shrewdly, and got up out of his chair. He stood about five feet six.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed fervently.

"Hello! Why this outburst?" inquired Jimmy.

"Because I'm rotting here with nothing to do," avowed the other. "Is it the war you've come to talk about? Got a load of patriotism to dump? 'Shoot if you must this old gray head, but spare your country's——'"

"No, it's not the war," broke in Jimmy amusedly.

"Ha! I know, of course. No American ever pokes in here unless he's got a grouch to be removed. Tell me your troubles—it may make me laugh." He held out his hand. "Perhaps my name is not unfamiliar to you. It's Smith. And I'm from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ever hear of it?"

Jimmy introduced himself. He perceived that he had a humorist to deal with.

"Pittsburgh?" he reflected. "Let me see. It's the place where they make millionaires while you wait, isn't it?"

"Wrong. Look at me. I waited there twenty-one years, and I'm what you see today. If you can find a dollar on me you can have it. My salary's overdrawn."

Jimmy chuckled. The little chap took his fancy.

"I've just been paid mine," he said. "If I can offer——"

Smith threw up both hands. His snub nose twitched ludicrously.

"Help!" he squealed. "Here's a nut running loose."

With startling suddenness he clothed himself with official gravity. He opened the visitor's book and proffered a pen.

"Will you register, Mr. Perry? Is there anything we can do for you?"

"Thanks. I would like ten minutes of the minister's time, if he can spare me that much."

Smith of Pittsburgh took his card and went into the next room. He returned in a minute or so, leaving the door ajar.

"This way, please," he begged, and on the heels of it dropped his voice to a whisper. "Say, you're a regular fellow, and I'll put you next. His nibs thinks he isn't of any more consequence than the Washington Monument. If you let on that you think so too, you can eat out of the same plate with him. Come on in."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE U. S. LEGATION

THE legation secretary, Mr. Leslie Whittaker, a subdued, bespectacled, middle-aged individual, received Jimmy from the hands of Smith and conducted him into a wide apartment where, rising ponderously from his desk, the Honorable John Henry Lane greeted him with the ceremony befitting the duly constituted representative of the world's greatest republic. He was a portly man with smooth-brushed graying hair and a close-cropped graying mustache. Jimmy, remembering instructions, was of half a mind to salute the ministerial knuckles as they whitened in his grasp; but he contented himself with a bow in his very best manner, and murmured a word of delight at the meeting. His excellency waved him to a chair.

"Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Perry," he invited, prepossessed by his visitor's deferential approach. "There is something I can do for you in my official capacity?"

"Not exactly that, sir. It is rather to your personal interest in my behalf that I wish to appeal."

The minister's manner became a shade distant. There was a glint of distrust in his eyes.

"Proceed, sir, please," he repeated.

"I may be here some days," continued Jimmy. "For reasons that I will give you I shall be grateful if the legation will take charge of a little money I have with me, permitting me to draw on it as I may need. The amount is nine hundred dollars."

Mr. Lane looked relieved.

"Why, yes, I will—ah—ahumph—undertake that for you, though it is not usual. There are banks——"

"I am coming to that, sir, if I may delay just a moment. The next favor I will ask is that you will send, in your official code, to the department at Washington a cable to be transmitted to my father, saying that I have convinced you that there are sound reasons to keep me from coming home at present, and that you are forwarding a letter from me in the legation pouch that will go into the question in full with him."

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The diplomat regarded him with a shocked expression that made Jimmy want to laugh, though he carefully repressed it.

"This, sir, is the most confoundedly impu — ah — ahumph — extraordinary request I have ever been asked to entertain," the great man delivered in magisterial tones. "You have convinced me of nothing, and yet you ask me to say——"

"I am coming to that, sir—now," interjected Jimmy. "I——"

But the other stopped him.

"Your card is before me, sir—" he tapped it with a well-manicured finger—"but it conveys to me no—ah—inkling of your identity. That you are an American is self-evident, and very young. Be good enough to tell me who your father is—his status, if you please."

"Why as for that," said Jimmy easily, "he is reputed to be the wealthiest man in eastern Virginia. It's only hearsay with me, understand — I can't prove it — father doesn't talk about it; but I do know that he is president of the Virginia-Carolina Phosphate Company, chairman of the N. & O. Railway, director in three banks, and only brother of Allan S. Perry, of the United States Senate. Perhaps you would like to glance over some letters I fished out of my trunk before coming here. They are from my father——"

It was enough. A remarkable transformation had taken place in the Honorable John Henry.

"Senator Perry's nephew!" he beamed. "My dear boy, you interest me amazingly. The name should have brought enlightenment at once. It was unpardonably stupid of me; but—ah—ahumph—the news of the war we are entering occupied my thoughts. Do you smoke?"

He had taken from a drawer a box of conchas while making these apologies. Jimmy lit one with the match clubbily proffered. The minister lighted up in his turn, and leaned back in his chair.

"Now, pray tell me, Mr. Perry, just what you'd have me do," he urged. "If it is anything my position does not positively inhibit you may consider it done. And I'll stretch a point where I can," he appended with a large smile.

Whereupon Jimmy gave him the substance of his conversation with Segovia in the room at the Europa, and mentioned their call on Morales, and the dinner invitation. Lane heard him through without interruption. His expression was thoughtful. The cloak of his affectations had fallen from him, and the man's natural worth was revealed.

"I have had rumors of a plot," he said, "and I have passed them on to Washington at their face value. We are fed on these rumors down here off and on, year in and out; but latterly none of them have come to a head. This, though, seems to have a shred of substance. But, my boy, you are taking a long chance, and I could not lift a finger to protect you."

Jimmy nodded.

"Sure. But if I pull it off it wouldn't be such a bad bit to do for Uncle Sam, would it?"

The Honorable John Lane did not reply in words, but the hand extended on his chair-arm rose and fell, deliberately, three times. It reminded Jimmy of spirit rappings. "Yes," it spelled according to the code. He smiled inwardly at the diplomatic subterfuge.

"How many Germans are there in Zanhoria?" he asked.

"One hundred here in Cortina; two hundred or more at Arraca, a lumber camp on the Caribbean slope; and perhaps another hundred or so scattered through the country."

"And what is the peace strength of the Zanhorian army?"

"Twelve hundred, all arms. About five hundred in Cortina, and the rest distributed among half a dozen small military posts."

"Um," grunted Jimmy. "Any of our boats about? I saw some off the canal."

"None, but I will see what can be done."

Jimmy grinned at him through a cloud of smoke.

"Do you think you can send that dispatch for me now, Mr. Lane?" he queried.

The minister rose from his desk.

"Sit here, my boy. Write what you wish me to say. And the letter to your father. Make yourself at home."

"Oh," said Jimmy, as with an afterthought of no especial consequence, "do you happen to know an American here named Walter Brewer? Something of an invalid. Lives in the Calle Dolores opposite the park."

Lane screwed up his eyes in the endeavor to place the person.

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"Brewer? No. I don't think he has registered with us. Would you like——"

"Oh, no. I just thought I'd ask. I met him last night. I'll get busy with the pen now."

Lane left the room, and Jimmy fell to at his desk. In the midst of it he stopped. A thought that subconsciously had entered his mind forced its way to his attention.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "The postmark on that envelope was blurred, but the last letters were 'aca' I'm sure of it. 'Arraca' Lane said was the name of that German lumber camp. *Wh-e-w!*"

He had not mentioned to Lane the card he had unwittingly read in Morales' office. He had felt a boyish fear of being laughed at for attaching importance to a thing which, to a wiser head, might be susceptible of a perfectly innocent interpretation. "D—VIII —K." It might be the combination to a safe, or to the deposit box of a bank customer who wished certain papers forwarded to him. But if this were the case why did not a letter accompany the cryptogram? And there was Morales' moment of disquiet to explain.

JIMMY pondered this a while. He came to the decision to say nothing about it for the present, and went on with his writing. He finished, and then bethought himself of the money he desired to leave with Lane. He was counting it out when the envoy came in.

"Through?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. Here is my cash, and here is about what I'd like to have cabled. I expect you to change it as you think proper; all I want is to make father know that I'm not just loafing here. My letter gives particulars. I've asked him to let Uncle Allan know how kind you've been to me."

Jimmy introduced this last with canny calculation. Presidential preferments to office depend upon senatorial sanction. And there were better billets than Zanhoria for those in favor with the powers that be.

"James," said the minister movingly, "I wish I could say that all of my fellow countrymen who seek out this legation give me the pleasure I find in your acquaintance. Some of them——"

He made a wry face, as though he were swallowing a nauseous pill, and sat down in the chair Jimmy had vacated.

"I will write you a receipt for this money, and we will then drop in at the International Club for a bite of lunch. I am a man without a family or you should have a warmer welcome than a club affords. But you may have a sight of Herr Kaufman there. He comes in occasionally. We have been a little stiff with each other since Bernstorff was handed his passports, and now——"

He shrugged and wrote out the receipt, after which he ran through Jimmy's cable. He was initialing it when the telephone rang. He took up the instrument, and as he listened to the voice at the other end he directed a mysterious look at his young friend.

"Ah, Señor Morales! Yes, this is Mr. Lane—yes, I've had a call from him—yes, indeed, a very prominent family. Yes, yes. And his uncle is the senior senator from Virginia. Yes, he is traveling only on pleasure—certainly. I understand—not at all. You are quite welcome."

The minister hung up the receiver and turned to Jimmy.

"You heard my half. Morales wanted to know who you were, he was so agreeably impressed with you."

"A little ante-prandial information," suggested Jimmy with twinkling eyes. "Something to talk about with the roast."

"Possibly," Lane returned. His air was serious. "The truth is, James, I don't know what to think of it. He should have made his inquiry before inviting you to dinner."

"Oh, Segovia was my voucher, as far as that goes," said Jimmy. He struck the desk with his hand in sudden illumination. "I say, Mr. Lane! That dinner is simply the excuse for an opportunity to pump Segovia. He is close to the Government. I'm just a catspaw for Morales. He asked about me out of simple curiosity."

"Perhaps," conceded Lane, though not heartily. "This American girl, Miss Taylor, you met at the bank—where is she from?"

"Minnesota. She didn't mention the town."

"You say she's a friend of Morales?"

"Of his wife. Ripping good sort—Miss Taylor. And, by Jove, it was a case of 'Don't shoot, I'll come down' with Enrique the minute he laid eyes on her. Quickest thing ever happened."

The other did not smile at the sally; he seemed preoccupied. But he shook off his abstraction and got up.

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"Let us go to lunch," he said.

On the way out the minister stopped to hand Whittaker the cablegram to file for transmission in code. Jimmy strolled ahead into Smith's room. The gentleman from Pittsburgh greeted him with brotherly fervor.

"Gee, but you had a sitting with him! Did you get along O. K.?"

"I'll leave it to you. I'm going to lunch with him—eat out of the same plate."

"Ha! I gave you the right steer—what?"

"You did. I owe you one. What did your chums call you at school, old man? For a guess I wouldn't say Cyril."

Smith's nose twitched.

"Cyril Smith? Oh, Lord! Bill is what they called me when they wanted to be polite—Billy, when they didn't give a darn."

"Well, Billy," Jimmy smiled, "drop around and see me at the Europa when you've nothing better to do. Maybe we can scare up something."

"Shake, Jimmy; I'm on," said Billy solemnly.

As this ceremony was concluded Lane came out from the inner room, and Jimmy departed with him for the club. The way took them along the Plaza Central and by the Banco Nacional. As they approached the bank Jimmy saw that Morales' car was gone from before the door. It had taken Miss Taylor home in all probability. He wondered where Segovia was. He might be waiting for him at the hotel. And then a thing occurred that left but one thought in his mind.

The International Club was on the corner of the Calle Central and the Calle Grande, west of the bank. They were at the door when a touring car with a huge negro drove by on the Calle Grande. In the tonneau, grave and pale, sat Winifred Brewer.

Jimmy swept off his hat. Lane looked at him curiously, and at the girl. Her eyes rested on the young man unsmilingly—mournfully, it seemed to the minister. Only the slightest inclination of her head returned the bow; then she was carried on. Jimmy, oblivious of his companion, watched the machine. It slowed down when it reached the east side of the square, passed the post-office, and stopped before a *farmacia*. The girl got out and went in. Jimmy swung around to Lane with compressed lips. He offered no explanations.

"I am going to ask you, sir, to be good enough to excuse me from this luncheon. Please believe that I'm keenly alive to the kindness, but to be frank with you I must speak with the young lady in that car."

The Honorable John Henry had not altogether forgotten the days of his own youth. He responded genially.

"Assuredly, James. We will call the engagement simply postponed. You will find a card to the club in your mail tomorrow."

They shook hands, and Jimmy plunged across the plaza in the direction of the pharmacy. Lane's eyes followed him.

"I wonder who she is?" he murmured. "Ahumph. Politics and petticoats. They don't mix well."

He wagged his head wisely, and went in to his solitary meal.

CHAPTER V

FRIENDS FOR THE FLAG

WINIFRED was at the rear of the store, her back to the door, waiting on the order she had given the clerk, who was busy with it at the prescription desk behind a wooden screen farther on. No other person was about.

Jimmy's glance, as he entered, took in the listless droop of the small, slender figure in drab linen, and his heart swelled with a rush of pity. He guessed her reason for passing him as she had, and it was to overset it, if he could, that he had determined to follow her.

She turned as he advanced. The color flowed into her face, and ebbed as quickly. She stood silently regarding him. He went directly to his point without preface or pretense.

"We parted friends, I had hoped," he said. "On my side it would take more than one day, or a thousand of them, to forget what you did for me. I wish that on your side there was something to remember."

"There is," she answered with a strange scrutiny of him, and stayed her words there.

"If it is adverse to me will you not give me a chance to correct it, if I can?" he begged. "Your opinion is not a thing I hold lightly. I would like for you to believe that, Miss Brewer. I am very much in earnest."

Her eyes wavered away from his.

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"It is nothing adverse to you; it is adverse to myself. And I must not forget it."

Her voice died syllable by syllable in her throat.

Jimmy understood, but he would have cut his heart out rather than let her know. He said simply:

"I want your friendship, and I want to give you mine. To me nothing else matters so much as this—nothing else but the duty I owe my country, and which will keep me here for a while. We are at war with Germany, or practically so——"

"Ah! It has come at last!"

Her eyes were alight, her voice alive.

"You did not know?" he asked.

"No. We have gone into the country. We left this morning. I came in for some medicine for my father. He was taken suddenly ill. I have spoken with no one. We are at war, you say? Ah, if only I were——"

She ceased. She had forgotten herself, had been carried away in the thrill of the moment. Jimmy smiled gravely at her.

"I know," he said. "If you were in the States you would do your bit. Of that I am sure." He looked about him, and stepped closer to her. "Suppose—" oddly enough he found himself repeating Segovia's question of the morning—"suppose, Miss Winifred, you could be of service right here in Zanhoria, could put in a stroke for the flag that would be of real importance? Would you answer to the call?"

Again the light flashed into her dark eyes. Her head went up, and she spoke, guardedly, as he had done, but with no smallest hesitancy—

"At any cost!"

"It may come to pass," he said thoughtfully. "I am in the dark myself as yet, but tonight I expect to know more of what is intended. I have been chosen to take a part. Would you be willing to tell me if the place you have gone to in the country is retired, away from people who might wish to pry?"

She searched his face for a long beat of time.

"Yes," she replied.

"Thank you. If what I expect to learn tonight should make it seem to me advisable to ask your aid how may I talk with you? I should be afraid to use the telephone."

She was silent. They could hear the clerk moving behind his screen. He would be coming to them soon.

"I will say to you," Jimmy added earnestly, "that it is farthest from my thought of self to seek you out against your wish. I am putting myself aside entirely in this. It is for our country—yours and mine. That comes first."

She nodded slowly, more to herself than to him; and yet it was his words that decided her.

"Yes, that comes first. We are at the old Rafael Fernandez hacienda on the Santa Marta Road. It is ten miles out. We haven't a telephone, but we shall send in for the mail every few days, and if it is so that you can write me a line in advance——"

She broke off, for the clerk had issued from his den. Jimmy with a quick gesture conveyed to her his understanding of the condition she imposed, and prepared to go. To wait and conduct her to her car would not, he felt, be an acceptable attention. For the benefit of the man behind the counter he said with easy friendliness:

"I trust that you will find your father much improved on your return. Please present my compliments to him."

He thought the look she gave him held a secret question that perplexed her. He met it openly, bowed, and went away. He made his way to the Europa. At the desk he was handed a note. It was from Enrique. It said only:

> Dinner at seven. I will call for you.
>
> E.

Jimmy decided against lunch with but himself as guest. He was not hungry, and it was only because of his hope to have a sight of Kaufman that he had accepted Lane's invitation. He went up-stairs, donned his pajamas, and threw himself on the bed. Miss Taylor, it was evident, had not turned Enrique's head to the detriment of the project they had afoot. He dwelt on this latter phase of his affairs a while. Was it only yesterday that he had come ashore from the boat? It seemed a week. This brought his thoughts around to his misadventure in the park and, quite naturally, to Winifred Brewer. Here they rested till his eyes grew heavy with the heat that beat in on him through the jalousied windows.

"Wonderful girl!" he murmured, and carried her off with him to the land of dreams.

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SEGOVIA came at the appointed hour. Jimmy was dressed and waiting for him. His evening clothes set him off to fine advantage. He looked strong, forceful—capable, in a word. Segovia surveyed him approvingly, with the pride a man has in his pick of friends.

"Well?" said Jimmy. His eyes were quizzical.

Segovia dodged the question, knowing full well what it implied.

"I am foot-loose. My resignation is accepted," he replied.

This paltry evasion Jimmy calmly ignored.

"We have met before today, or have you forgotten it?" he observed. "Let me recall what we did. You went with me to the bank, and you introduced me to the banker. Apparently you were in the best of health, but you were taken with a seizure——"

Segovia broke in on the recital with a laugh.

"I surrender!" His tone altered. "She's the most interesting woman, Jimmy, I've ever met. She has seen such a lot."

"She's stunning," said Jimmy, in cordial agreement with him. "I've made an engagement for you to meet her again."

Segovia stared at him.

"Why, I saw her off in her car. She was going straight home."

Jimmy regarded him with humorous enjoyment.

"It was with Morales I made the engagement," he drawled. "He has invited us to dine with him Thursday night."

"I accept," put in Enrique with alacrity.

"I thought you would." The drollery faded from Jimmy's eyes. "What," he queried, "do you imagine Morales' object is? Not just a courtesy to me; I have no claim on his consideration. And it's not solely for the entertainment of Miss Taylor. It is to be, as I understand it, a small affair—no other guests but ourselves. A sort of close communion, you might call it."

The Zanhorian studied him attentively.

"What's the answer?" he demanded. "You've got one."

"I told Mr. Lane that I thought Morales wanted to pump you—find out if your Government was 'jerry' to what is going on."

"Ah, so you have been discussing the cabal with his excellency!"

A shade of annoyance crossed Segovia's face.

"Yes. I couldn't conceive of any objection to it. And if you will stop to think, Enrique, it was my duty. He represents the sovereignty of my Government. Whatever concerns that sovereignty here in Zanhoria is his business more than mine. I didn't feel justified in attempting what we have in mind without first letting him know. He is with us."

"He said that?"

Segovia's face lighted up.

"You bet he didn't," grinned Jimmy. "He's a diplomat. But I can read the high sign when it's passed to me. I can't appeal for his protection if I get into a scrape, but what he can do privately he will do. You can hand that on to your uncle under the rose. Lane is a good old scout, when you get to know him."

"Did he think this dinner was arranged to draw me out?" asked Segovia.

"He didn't agree with me there, at least not with any marked enthusiasm," Jimmy confessed. "He inquired about Miss Taylor instead. He seemed interested in her, and he's not married. I've a notion," he added slyly, "that he is hoping she will find business at the legation. I told him she was mighty easy on the eyes."

Segovia put on his hat.

"We must go," he said. "My uncle is expecting us."

"What!" Jimmy was really startled. "I thought we were to dine at your club? You didn't say, but I got the impression somehow. How the dickens are we going to talk over this scheme of yours?"

Enrique accorded him an amused glance.

"You are not dining tonight with the secretary of state, old man, but with a simple gentleman under his own roof, and with an old friend of his, another simple gentleman, one Don Emilio Ortega, whose name, I think, I have mentioned before. Surely four men met in this way may talk of what they like."

"Great Peter!" ejaculated Jimmy, and followed dumbly down the stairs. A big automobile stood at the curb.

"My uncle's," said Segovia as they got in. "My car is being overhauled, but I'll have it in the morning."

They were silent some minutes, then Segovia spoke.

"I shouldn't wonder if Don Emilio had

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discovered Mr. Brewer's address for you," he remarked. "I asked him to try to locate him."

"Why," returned Jimmy, "I happen to have learned that myself."

He told of his meeting with Winifred, but omitted the pregnant details. It was not, he felt, the moment to reveal them.

"And where is this house?" inquired Segovia.

Jimmy hesitated, yet if Ortega knew he would tell Enrique.

"It is on the Santa Marta Road, the Rafael Fernandez hacienda," he exclaimed.

The information seemed to excite Segovia's interest.

"I know the place. He must have secured it in advance for just such a move—if he took fright from any cause. It's a stone house with walls a foot thick. It is well off the road, on a hill that butts out from the forest like a great bald head. What a place for Kaufman if Brewer wasn't what he is!"

"I was thinking of that," said Jimmy tersely.

CHAPTER VI

JUAN LOPEZ TELLS HIS STORY

THE butler was passing the cigars and coffee. An excellent dinner it had been, and deftly served. Jimmy had enjoyed it, but he was anxious to "get down to business," as he would have phrased it had he spoken his thought. In his pocket was a card Enrique had quietly handed him before they came in to table. On it was penciled Brewer's present address, in Señor Ortega's writing, he presumed. It was, as it happened, a superfluity, but it testified to an efficiency that could be relied on.

Jimmy studied the man again. He was seated opposite him, on Don Luis Valera's left, and talking with the secretary. Jimmy, had he not known to the contrary, would never have suspected that Don Emilio was the chief police official of the Republic of Zanhoria. There was nothing brusk or militant in his manner. Above all, there was nothing that smacked of opera-bouffe. He was a keen-faced, compactly built, tranquil man, with gray eyes that saw everything without seeming to do so; and his English was as fluent as Segovia's.

The servant definitely withdrew, and almost instantly a subtle change came over the company. Until now the talk had been of world matters in general, with a careful avoidance of special emphasis on the new rôle the United States had stepped into with the President's epoch-making speech. Now Don Luis turned from Ortega and addressed Jimmy. The secretary was tall and lean and patrician to the bone.

"Your country will have its hands full presently, Mr. Perry," he said, his slow English heightening the charm of a mellow voice.

Here was the chance to get down to business and Jimmy grasped it.

"It looks like it, sir," he returned. "If any side issues pop up the sooner they're disposed of the better for the main fight she has taken on."

Segovia exchanged a glance with Don Emilio. It said—

"You see the stuff he's made of?"

"I agree with you," Don Luis answered Jimmy. "But events have a way of taking their own course. One has to wait on them; they can't be hurried."

"May I tell a story?" requested Jimmy. "An old darky in my State was going to plow his cotton patch. He brought out his mule and before putting him to the plow he swung back his foot and planted a heavy blow in the animal's stomach. 'What's the matter, uncle?' asked a white man who was passing. 'The mule isn't doing anything.' 'Nossir,' said the negro, 'an' he ain't gwine to do ennythin'. I knows dis mewl. He wuz fixin' fer to kick me w'en I starts to hitch de trace-chain to him, but I'se done beat him to it, an' I won't have no trubbel wif him now.' "

Jimmy had taken pains with the delivery of this anecdote in order that the two older men might follow him. A little pause ensued, then Ortega put his head back and laughed.

"You get me, I see," Jimmy grinned. But he sobered immediately. "I wasn't cut out for a diplomat," he went on. "I'd make a frightful mess of the part if I tried. So you won't mind, will you, if I speak right from the shoulder and say what I'm thinking?"

Don Luis motioned him to proceed. The police superintendent leaned his arms on the table, and made invisible tracings on the damask with his finger. It concealed the interest his eyes would have betrayed. Jimmy continued:

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"We've had a bully dinner, something to remember. But as I understand it we didn't come solely for that. Enrique has told me that there's trouble brewing for your country that will affect mine. That makes it a common cause with the four of us. To get down to brass tacks—I mean the point at issue—what are we going to do about it?"

Don Emilio looked up from his pattern-making. It appeared that he was to be the spokesman for his side.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You have cleared the way admirably, Mr. Perry. We are informed of what Don Enrique has related to you—from himself. It is correct, I need not say. We will go further into it presently. But first, with your permission, I would like Señor Valera and yourself to hear from Juan Lopez direct about these meetings at Morales' house. Shall we have Juan in, Señor?"

Don Luis touched a bell. To the servant who appeared he gave a brief order. Ortega's gray eyes smiled at Jimmy.

"You have met Juan before, I believe, Mr. Perry?"

"Informally," countered Jimmy. "But I discovered he had a very taking way with him."

Ortega laughed softly. This young American appealed to him. But his manner changed. Lopez was being led in by a policeman in plain clothes.

The half-breed glanced about him abashed and out of countenance. The rich appointpointments of the room, the great opalescent dome of light overhead, the glittering flasks of liquors on the snowy cloth beneath, the incense of Havana in the air—it was fairyland to him. Ortega dismissed the policeman, and pointed the *mestizo* to a chair by the serving-table.

"You may sit down, Lopez," he said. His tone was austere yet not forbidding. He addressed Segovia. "I am afraid our friend may not be able to cope with dialectic Spanish. Will you have the goodness to translate to him?"

Segovia nodded. Ortega turned to his prisoner.

"Aside from myself is there any one here you recognize, Lopez?"

Juan's eyes had flitted to and from Jimmy's face uneasily. They had discovered the partially concealed patch of court-plaster on his head.

"Yes, Excellency," he mumbled. "That gentleman."

"Good!" encouraged Ortega. "Any one else?"

"No, Excellency."

The merest breath of relief escaped Ortega. It were better that the secretary of state should remain unknown in this.

"Good!" he encouraged again. "The truth lies upon your lips tonight, I see. It is well for you. Otherwise—I think you understand, Juan, what would follow. Eh?"

Juan shivered. He understood very well indeed.

"Now," continued the superintendent, "you will repeat what you told me this morning. If you omitted anything at that time you have the opportunity to supply it. Go carefully, Juan, and waste not your words."

The group about the table listened in motionless silence as the half-breed began to speak.

"It is at the house of the Señor Don Manuel Morales that my woman is cook, Excellency—in the Avenida Alejandrino, at a distance from the city, and in much ground of its own. Marica, she sleeps in the garage at the back of the house. By favor of the Señor Morales I am permitted to occupy the room with my woman."

"And what other servants are there?" catechized Ortega.

"Three others, Excellency. A maid for the rooms, and one for the table; also Gaspar, the chauffeur, a poor creature at best who knows only to drive his car. He sleeps in the garage, and through his nose. It is as the wind in the chimney on a night in Winter."

Lopez stopped to rally his forces to the foreign task of epitomizing a narrative which under other conditions he would have delighted to embroider with details.

"IT IS on a Sunday night the people come," he proceeded. "Not every Sunday night; sometimes it is a week—two weeks—and they do not come; but always it is a Sunday night they meet, no other. And always but five men, and when the world is in sleep. I count the strokes from the tower of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad. They are twelve.

"It is two months since that I began to notice it. I am coming from a friend's place, a little *cantina*—wholly respectable—

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and it is late. It is a long walk from Miguel's—the *cantina*, Excellency, of which I speak—an entirely respectable——"

Ortega coughed ominously, and the half-breed swerved back into the narrow paths of concision.

"An automobile is driving up to the Señor Morales' door, Excellency. I conceal myself. I do not desire to attract attention at that so late hour; for it is the señor himself who stands without the door to receive his guests. They enter. The automobile drives away. But now, as I find myself at the garage door, comes another car. Five in all, Excellency. I seek my bed, and I forget in sleep what I have seen.

"But once more I come on a Sunday night from Miguel's, and once more I see what I have seen before. I think on it this time—some, not much—and forget in sleep. Again I am coming from Miguel's—it is a week now past—and again the cars. Always only five. This time I am flat down beneath the orange-tree by the door. I wait till all have entered, and all the cars are gone. I fall asleep under the tree. How long, I know not, Excellency; but I am awakened by a voice.

"It is a man speaking at the door to the Señor Morales. He goes away a few steps, and returns. It is with a small limp he walks. Not a large man but short, and round, with a beard that shows against the stars. More I can not see of him, for it is dark. He speaks in Spanish, but not as you or me, Excellency. Not with ease. I strain my ears, but the words I do not catch, except one, a word that is not Spanish—a small word, as he goes away at last, as if talking with himself."

"Can you give me that word, Juan, as it sounded to you?" asked the superintendent. He was idly fingering his *petit verre* of noyau.

"'*Gott*', it sounded to me, Excellency."

Ortega made a derogatory motion with his hand.

"English," he stated. "It tells nothing. The same as '*Dios.*' Well, is there something else, Lopez?"

"It is all, Excellency. They do not come again this Sunday last."

Ortega directed a boring look into the half-breed's eyes.

"You have spoken of this to how many, Lopez—one, two, three persons?"

"To none but your Excellency, as God sees me," replied the man earnestly.

Ortega held him an instant longer with his gaze.

"It is well," he said. "You may go."

Lopez smirked, and bowed himself to the door and into the hands of the man waiting for him on the outer side. The company at the table relaxed. Don Emilio spoke to the secretary.

"It is the Imperial German Minister, you perceive, señor. Short, and round, and bearded—and a little lame. And the interjection Lopez overheard; it places the nationality beyond a doubt."

"Yes," assented Don Luis. He smoked on silently.

"Does Kaufman speak English?" queried Jimmy of the police official.

"Naturally. He is a trained diplomat."

"That suits my book; I'm not good at sign language," Jimmy grinned. "What's the next move on the board, please?"

"We must wait. Herr Kaufman is at Arraca since Sunday. When he returns——"

Jimmy interrupted with an exclamation.

"By George! I'd forgotten it. Has any one a pencil?"

Ortega supplied him. Jimmy had taken from his pocket the card inscribed with Brewer's address. He turned it over, made a few marks, and pushed pencil and card across to the superintendent.

"What do you make of it, sir?" he asked.

"'D—VIII—K,'" Ortega read out. He frowned at the writing, and passed it on to Don Luis. "You must go further, Mr. Perry. It needs a context."

Jimmy recounted the incident at the bank.

"'Aca' were the letters I made out in the postmark. It's plain as day now. Arr-aca. Kaufman is there. It's a message from him."

"Yes," remarked Segovia. "But what message?" His uncle had passed the card over to him. "'D—VIII—K'. What does it stand for? 'VIII.' It might be a chapter from a book."

Ortega came out of a brown study. He raised his cordial to his lips, sipped it, and put the glass down.

"They meet always on Sunday," he voiced dreamily. "'D' is for Domingo. In this month the Sundays fall on the first, eighth, fifteenth——"

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"Ah!" It was Segovia. "Domingo—the eighth—Kaufman. It is simple. Kaufman writes to Morales from Arraca and sets the date for their next meeting. Bravo, Don Emilio!"

Ortega disclaimed the praise.

"It is a guess only, my friend. I may be wrong. And if I am right it is always possible that Herr Kaufman may advance the date. I have arranged today for information from Arraca; Herr Kaufman is under observation, and Morales. In the meantime we must prepare."

"Haven't we overlooked a point?" Jimmy asked, a quick thought demanding utterance. "How do we know that Sunday the eighth is not the date for the uprising against the Government? That may be the meaning of the message."

Don Luis answered.

"We don't know, Mr. Perry. But, as Señor Ortega has said, we can prepare. In fact, I may say that we are preparing, quietly, in a way that will not cause comment. What we wish, however, is to nip the movement in the bud, and prevent disorders throughout the State."

"Then," burst out Jimmy impulsively, "let's start in and do it. My way would be to jump a train for Arraca, watch my chance to nab Kaufman on the quiet, and punch his head off if he doesn't come across with what he's got up his sleeve. He's the key to the plot. Get him, and you've got the entire works."

Segovia with a word or two made Jimmy's thoughtless slang intelligible to the others. Don Luis smiled patiently.

"Mr. Perry," he said, "let me make the situation clear to you. Arraca is close to our eastern frontier, up the Rio Negro some twenty miles from the coast. Three years ago the Zanhorian Government granted a concession of timber land to a German syndicate, and they established a lumber camp there. But it is only since trouble with your country loomed large and threatening that the camp has taken on a sinister aspect. The roster has grown until now there are four hundred men when until recently there were but two hundred. The increase, you will observe, is out of all proportion to any normal requirement for labor."

"I should say it was!" cried Jimmy.

The secretary went on.

"Herr Kaufman has a financial interest in the enterprise, which gives his visits to the camp a plausible color. So far we have not a point against him that would hold good in an international court. We suspect him only; to prove what we suspect is an altogether different matter."

The secretary wet his lips with the liqueur before him, and after a deliberate moment he said:

"I will put the case in a nutshell. President Hurango's sympathies in the present war are with the Entente Allies. Herr Kaufman, we believe, has organized machinery to overthrow the President and proclaim in his place General Federico Peralta, who failed of election two years ago.

In return Peralta would favor German interests, and maintain an attitude of neutrality in the war. But Herr Kaufman has a deeper end in view, we suspect. He hopes that, beginning with Zanhoria, he can foment a series of revolutions in the Central American republics. Should he succeed, the United States would be compelled to intervene with the result that it would divert some of her forces in this direction when her full strength is needed by her allies abroad."

"Oh, by Jove!" exploded Jimmy. "That won't do."

"These things we suspect only," proceeded Señor Valera. "To give verity to our suspicions we must catch the conspirators red-handed. What we have learned tonight may help us. What you have just proposed would certainly, if you will pardon me for saying it, put what we seek beyond us. The thing could not be done. You would be caught, and shot."

"Then," said Jimmy quietly, "let us start here. Let us, as we say at home, 'talk turkey'. I have engaged to kidnap Kaufman. When, where and how is what we've got to decide on."

There was a little shocked stillness in the room. This American bluntness was overwhelming. Then Ortega laughed deep down in his throat.

"By all means, Don Luis, let us 'talk turkey'," he urged.

It was late when Jimmy was returned to his hotel in the secretarial car. He was whistling lightly as he made ready for bed. In the morning, if all went well, he would take a run out to the Fernandez hacienda in Enrique's automobile.

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CHAPTER VII

A CALL ON BREWER

JIMMY made his start in the cool of the day. He had received his instructions in the route from Enrique.

"Go down the Calle Central four squares to the Avenida Alejandrino. Turn west and follow the avenue till you strike the open country. You will come to a stone bridge over an arroyo. Cross it, and the first turn to the south is the Santa Marta Road. You will know the Fernandez place by a big crumbling gateway in the remnants of a wall, and a driveway winding up the hill."

Jimmy wished that there was some immediate way to apprize Winifred of his coming. He could understand that she would wish to prepare her father for it, but he surmised that she did not intend to do this until she should be in receipt of the promised line of warning through the mail. His unexpected advent would very likely give Brewer a bad five minutes, but he must risk this. Kaufman might return from Arraca at any moment, and events take on a swifter march. His visit to the Brewers was, therefore, a matter of today and not tomorrow.

He slowed his machine when he was well out on the Avenida Alejandrino. He wanted a good look at Morales' house in passing. It was not far from the city limits, Enrique had told him—a large, handsome residence, with an inviting loggia on the upper floor over the entrance. There were no other houses close by.

Jimmy came to it presently. It was on the north side of the street, and a little back from it. A granolithic walk led between the brilliant flower-beds to the door. Over the way was an open field with a grove of conifers bordering the street.

Moving among the flower-beds before the house was a tall figure in lavender organdy. It was Miss Taylor. A light, ornamental basket hung from her arm half-filled with flowers. In the loggia, looking down at her, sat a bulky elderly woman, the Señora Morales, Jimmy concluded. He threw out his clutch suddenly, and stopped the car. Miss Taylor had responded to his salute with a movement that indicated a desire to speak with him. she sauntered toward the street, and he slid out from under the wheel to meet her.

"I couldn't help it," she smiled as she came near. "Away from home a fellow-countryman is a lodestone to draw one."

Jimmy's fetching grin flashed on her.

"If I were sitting on my own door-step, and you came along I'd thank my lucky stars," he said gallantly.

"For that," she rejoined, "you shall have a rose for your coat, this red Laurentia."

She pinned it in his buttonhole.

"You intend staying in Cortina awhile, it seems. You have brought your car with you."

"Oh, it's not mine. It's Segovia's."

Jimmy experienced a small sense of embarrassment. She was wondering, doubtless, why he was out alone in Enrique's car.

"It's a new make to me; I'm trying to master the brute," he explained.

"Oh, it is Mr. Segovia's!" Miss Taylor displayed interest. He has promised me a drive. I am looking forward to it."

"He kept that to himself," thought Jimmy.

"I am passionately fond of motoring," she went on. "Are you going out into the country, or just 'round about the town?"

Jimmy realized that here was a bid for a spin. It took him slightly aback. For a halting second he was tempted to tell her bluntly that he was on a business errand, but remembered in time his first statement. He said with mock seriousness:

"I'm going to destruction if I don't get the hang of this gear-shift; yet I'd sue for company if it wasn't for just one thing."

"And what is that, pray?"

"Segovia. He's Spanish, you know. He'd put poison in my tea, or something. I daren't risk it."

He chuckled his way back to his seat, doing it so well that the rebuff was not a measurable quantity. She laughed lightly, though Jimmy thought he could detect a cold spark in the blue luster of her eyes.

"I have always heard that prudence is the close companion of valor," she said. "I know now how to gage you."

She nodded her dismissal of him, and he bowed and drove away.

He crossed the bridge over the arroyo, passed through the fringe of cane huts, occupied by half-castes, to be found in all the suburbs of Cortina, and came at length to the Santa Marta Road. It was a national highway, but fallen largely into

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disuse since the completion of the railroad to Santa Marta. He turned into it, and settled down for a ten-mile run. He had been frowning to himself for some minutes past.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed of a sudden. "She's Swedish. There's a lot of Swedes in Minnesota. It explains that little trace of accent she has."

He swerved out for a string of crawling ox-carts laden with produce for the city. As he speeded on the frown settled on his face again. His thoughts persisted with Miss Mary Taylor.

"I couldn't have been mistaken—it was a plain bid for a ride," he told himself. "Why? If she was some gushing young thing just out of school I could understand it. But she's thirty, or so close to it that it's catching. And she's been everywhere. An automobile isn't a novelty to her. Why the dickens should she want to cut around with me at this time of day?"

He found himself going back to the meeting with Miss Taylor in the bank. He recalled the evident complacency with which Morales had viewed Enrique's attraction to her, and his adroit opening of the way for the young woman's presentation to Enrique's uncle, the secretary of state. Well, when one stopped to think of it, there was nothing in that. Enrique was a figure in the town, and to be cultivated; and Don Luis could in many respects smooth the path of Miss Taylor's magazine researches. And so with the dinner he was invited to.

Ordinarilly a man of these latitudes did not at first blush introduce a stranger into his home. But here Enrique came in again; it was his sponsorship that had opened the banker's door to him, an act of courtesy not so extraordinary, in the circumstances, as to give rise to sinister speculations. He brought up with a laugh at himself.

"Pshaw! That clout on the head must have addled my brains. Because I know Morales to be a scheming revolutionist, I am trying to find a wrong twist in everything he does."

He put the matter out of his mind, for a glance at his speedometer showed that he must be nearing the Fernandez place. The country had grown wild and picturesque. The mountains—from the city a blue haze—were taking on distinct outlines against the sky; and the road was climbing steadily upward. But at a sharp turn to the west it dipped down into a verdured ravine through which flowed a shallow stream.

An armadillo, surprised in his lumbering passage across the thread of open ground rolled himself into a bony ball and waited for the purring monster to attack him or go on. A gaudy toucan sounded an alarm from a wild banana tree and flamed away. There were calls and chatterings of wild things from every side.

THE stream was not bridged, but it was an easy ford and Jimmy put his car across without trouble. He wondered how they managed when the rainy season, now only a few weeks off, set in; the rivulet would be a swollen torrent. He breasted the opposite rise, and a little farther on came to the ruined pillars of the gateway Enrique had described to him. Within, on each side, lay a wide stretch of land that years ago was a fruitful coffee plantation, but now was a waste of scrub and giant weeds.

A Spanish elm with mournful streamers of bind-weed swinging from the topmost branches stood a lone sentinel over the gateway. Jimmy turned in under it, and drove along the rough road that finally wound up the hill on the summit of which Enrique had said he would find the farmhouse. It was hidden from his view by a fringe of trees above. He passed through this a few moments later, and came abruptly on the house.

It faced the north—a square, rugged structure built of stone hewn from the rocky hillside. It stood high for a single-story dwelling, suggesting ample air space below and above the rooms. A half a dozen steps led up under a wooden weather-porch to the door. The door was open and through the passage which cut the house in twain Jimmy had a glimpse of deep woods beyond. But his attention was rudely diverted from this prospect by a very personal matter.

A man stepped out from the trees at the side of the car. The blue steel of a revolver showed in his hand, and the barrel was on a line with Jimmy's heart.

It was Brewer. His lips were drawn back in a wolfish grin.

"I heard you coming," he snarled. "And I could see you on the last turn. I would

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have taken a shot at you, but I was afraid I'd miss. I've got you now!"

It was plain to Jimmy that the man was nerved to his pose by a desperate fear. The pistol shook visibly in his hand, and his face was void of color. He was hatless, and his prematurely whitened hair stood awry on his head. He had the appearance of a ghost suddenly evoked from the shades.

Jimmy did not enjoy the situation. He could not believe that Brewer would shoot him down in cold blood, but with that faltering finger on the trigger an accident was possible. He wondered where Winifred was.

"Haven't you made a mistake in your man, Mr. Brewer?" he said appeasingly. "I am in your daughter's debt. I could not have any but the friendliest intentions in coming here."

He saw the other's strained attitude give way a trifle. But he was still in the grip of his fear. His eyes darted furtively here and there, as though to guard against surprise from possible accomplices of this visitor.

"How did you know where to find us?" he demanded harshly.

Jimmy decided on the simple truth for his answer.

"From Miss Brewer. I came across her in the city yesterday, in a drug-store where she was having a prescription filled. We spoke of the war. I told her that there were certain influences at work here in Zanhoria that would make trouble for our country, and that as Americans we might be able to do something to avert it. I was to be put in possession of information that night, I said to her, and if it was a pressing matter I would advise with her, and you, about it. I knew, of course, that I could count on your patriotism."

The pistol had dropped slowly to Brewer's side.

"Winifred told me of the war, but not of meeting you," he stated. "It is singular."

"I was to send her a line in advance of my coming," Jimmy explained. "I presume she thought it was not worth while speaking of until she heard. You see, if I had nothing to tell I was not to come."

"Then something has happened?"

There was a gleam of interest in Brewer's pale eyes. The revolver had vanished into his pocket.

"Something is going to happen," corrected Jimmy. "Shall we talk it over with Miss Brewer?"

He moved to get down from the car. Brewer made no objection, and he completed the descent. Brewer spoke.

"I am from Richmond. Norfolk is a near neighbor. You may have heard of me? I was in business in Richmond, on Main Street. Brokerage."

His efforts to make the query casual was evident, but Jimmy took heed to give no slightest sign that he remarked it. He shook his head, smiling his regret for his ignorance.

"I don't go to Richmond often. Nothing special to take me there. And I've been away at school a good deal. I wish, though, I'd had the luck to know you and Miss Brewer before."

Brewer's demeanor underwent a further change. He straightened his thin shoulders; his face was no longer bloodless.

"Let us go into the house," he invited. "Winifred is in the woods somewhere. After orchids, I think she said. She will be in soon."

They moved off side by side, but after a few steps Brewer came to a stand. His manner was embarrassed.

"Mr. Perry, I owe you an apology," he brought out. "The fact is, I'm not a well man. A nervous disorder. I am subject to—to illusions, and they lead me at times to deplorable lengths. I have come to this place hoping the quiet——"

"My dear sir!" Jimmy interposed. "You do not have to explain. I could see the other night that you were far from well. What you need, it seems to me, if my inexperience warrants an opinion, is something to lift you out of yourself. And I can supply it, sir. It is a thing you can do for our common country; that I—your daughter—the three of us working together can do; a thing that, if we are successful, will earn for us the thanks of our Government at Washington."

Brewer drew in a long breath, but he did not offer a reply.

They went into the house. A short time after Winifred came in, her arms filled with orchid blooms. At the door of the great cool living-room she was stricken motionless with what she saw. Her father and Mr. James Perry, Jr., were talking together and, apparently, in the best of understanding; and in her father's eyes was a light she

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had not witnessed there in all these dreary months.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

JIMMY sprang to his feet when Winifred appeared in the door.

"You see me in the greatest luck," he proclaimed. "I have been telling Mr. Brewer of the threatened trouble. He is going to do his bit for the good old U. S. A."

The girl gave her father a long, intent look. He nodded to her, brightly for him.

"I shall surely do it, Winifred. I am eager for the chance."

She came forward slowly, still under the spell of wonder at his air of high emprise. A large glass bowl was on the table, and in this she placed her orchids, speaking the while to Jimmy.

"You learned something, then, last night?"

"Yes. It is why I am here unheralded in advance. I was afraid to wait."

"Tell me," she requested.

She did not look at him; her head was bent over the flowers she was arranging.

Jimmy came to where she was standing, and took up a position across the table from her. Brewer left his chair and rambled fitfully about the room. The man's body was a parcel of quivering nerves that demanded motion, or a yet more potent relief. He worked his way nearer and nearer to the door as Jimmy talked with his daughter, and finally slipped out through it.

Jimmy spoke with dramatic brevity, though innocent of any intention to produce an effect. He simply wished to acquaint Winifred in the fewest words with what was in swing.

"It was determined on last night," he finished. "Enrique Segovia will drive the car. And by the way, it turned out that we had met before, in the States."

The girl's eyes were fixed on his face, and they were flamant with the stir of his story.

"Do I understand that it is here you are going to bring your prisoner?" she questioned. "That my father has consented to it?"

"He jumped at the chance. You heard him say it."

"Yes. And I am glad, very glad—only I —I am surprised."

She made the admission hesitantly, and with her head inclined away from him. Jimmy saw his opportunity and seized it.

"I am not surprised," he declared. "It was an appeal to his patriotism. He met it, as any true American would. I had a most pleasant talk with him. Among other things I found that we are, in a way of speaking, next-door neighbors at home. You live in Richmond. I wish I had known that, Miss Winifred—I mean that I wish I had known you there. It is no run at all from Norfolk."

Her eyes flashed back to him, then they were hidden by the long lashes as she bent once more above the flowers.

"Father told you about himself?" she murmured.

"Yes. That he had come to these tempered latitudes for his health. It is why I came. Pneumonia pretty nearly got me."

She glanced up at him with an expression of concern.

"Oh, I'm all right now—sound as a prize pumpkin," he went on breezily. "Do you know somehow it seems odd to be telling you this. I feel as if I had known you a long, long time, and my personal history ought to be familiar to you. Singular, isn't it?"

He grinned companionably, and her eyes cleared in response. The call of youth to youth will not be denied, though the world shakes upon its center. There was amusement in her voice as she replied.

"It is two days, isn't it? I wonder what a year would seem to you?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five perfect days," he rejoined with an emphasis that left her faintly pink.

Brewer's entrance brought the conversation back to its first intent. His bearing was more composed, for he had resorted to his accustomed sedative for clamorous nerves. Jimmy recognized the odor.

"He has told you, Winny?" he asked.

"Yes, father. We are to hold a certain person here until—until when?"

She turned to Jimmy.

"Until they have scotched the snake he has set to wiggling in the grass," he asserted.

"Well said," approved Brewer. "The thing to be decided now is where to lodge this person. Directly across the hall is my bedroom. It opens into my daugh-

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er's. Beyond that is our dining-room. This room that we are in opens only into the hall. Beyond are two separate rooms for which we have no present need. There is a lot of plunder in one of them that the owner of the house asked permission to leave. He is a man of some local consequence, I take it. I rented the place furnished, and it's not so badly done."

It was a long speech for him. He looked about as he closed with a satisfied air. He was, in fact, in better fettle than he had been in many a day. Winifred regarded him with a little pang at her heart. If he were only what he once was and could never be again!

"You are lucky, sir. It is very well done indeed," Jimmy said to him. "Which of the two rooms do you think will serve our purpose best?"

"I will leave it to you. Come and see," Brewer answered, and led the way out.

The sun filtered down through a wing-skylight in the hall. The wings were raised slightly to admit the air. They paused at the first of the unused rooms. It was large and high-ceiled, as were all the rooms of the dwelling. And the outer walls were as Segovia had said, thick and solid—the window-sills were at least ten inches in depth. But it was in the plunder-room, the last on that side of the hall, that Jimmy gave a cry of pleased surprise. The windows were heavily barred with iron. One opened to the east, and the two others to the south.

"By Jove, sir," he exulted, "here is the very place! This must have been intended originally as a strong room."

"There is a bedstead in the corner, and there are chairs," commented Winifred.

"And a table," Jimmy added. "We can clear this rubbish out and make quite a respectable cell of it," he chuckled gleefully, and stumbled over to one of the windows. "These bars are set in the solid masonry, and you couldn't squeeze a cat through them. A wonderful cage for our bird."

"First get the bird," Winifred reminded him.

"Oh, I'll get him. I've got to! Who was it that said—some old duffer 'way back yonder—'There's no such word as fail.' That's my motto. You can hang it on the wall of my room, if you will, Miss Winifred."

"Your room!" Her eyes were wide.

"Certainly," he replied. "The one next to this. A shake-down on the floor will do me. You don't think I'm going to leave the rôle of jailer to you and your father? That's my job."

"Mine too," chimed in Brewer. "I'm not going to be a dummy in this business. We will mount guard, Mr. Perry, turn and turn about. And if they attempt a rescue you will find me on the firing-line at your side."

Jimmy felt a small flow of respect for the man. He was not wholly of craven clay.

"Of course. We will do our bit together," he said.

"You seem to be leaving me out of your plans," Winifred interjected resentfully. "I've two eyes that can watch, and a hand that can shoot. If I had my target rifle here I would show you."

"Yes, she can shoot." Brewer nodded pridefully at Jimmy.

"And another thing I want you to understand, please," resumed the girl, her chin uplifted militantly. "I am to be treated in this matter exactly like a man. You are not to be afraid to tell me what you are thinking. I am not blind to the risk we are incurring. We may have a fight. We may be killed. But we will fight back to the last breath—the last! It is for the Flag. Better an honored death than to live on a coward."

She had let herself go with her words and had come to an entirely uncalculated climax. A suspensive moment followed for Jimmy; he groped for something bromidic to say that would save the situation for himself in his part of innocent stranger to Brewer's career. But it was Brewer who saved it for him. He was a little white about the lips, Jimmy saw in the fugitive glance he gave him.

"That, Winny, doesn't admit of argument," he said very quietly. "There are many things worse than death." To Jimmy he said: "I will see to it that the room is made ready. If you care to examine the approaches to the house my daughter will show you about. I tire easily, and I think I will lie down a while."

He went out and up the hall to his own room, and closed the door. From a cubboard in the wall he drew forth a whisky-bottle and a glass. His hand was shaking violently. He tilted the bottle to the glass, the neck of the one beating a tattoo on the other; but before a drop could fall

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he righted the bottle and restored it, with the glass to the cupboard. It was an act that involved an agony of self-denial. He turned away with a sound that was like a sob, and threw himself face downward on the bed; and he lay there as one dead.

WINIFRED conducted Jimmy out through the rear entrance of the house. As at the front a wooden porch gave protection from the weather. Jimmy noted that the door was of two-inch sun-seasoned wood that had seen neither oil nor varnish. It was fitted with a heavy chain-bolt in addition to the massive lock. He stopped and looked back.

"Is the front door like this one?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered briefly. With her father's abrupt leave of them a thoughtful silence had come upon her. Jimmy strove to rouse her from it.

"By George," he exclaimed, "this house is like a fort. It could stand a siege."

Winifred was on the step below him. She pointed to the windows and the dining-room.

"All of them have outside double shutters like these," she said. "Baywood, they call it here—mahogany we call it. It is common in the country."

Jimmy examined one of the shutters. It was solid with a peephole in the lower half.

"It is a fort," he declared. "Whoever built it expected trouble."

"It dates back, I believe, to the Walker Revolution in 1856," remarked the girl.

The forest marched down to within a hundred yards of the house. In the clearing between, to the extreme left, as they were facing, was a vegetable garden. To the right were a stable and some sheds. Jimmy could see an automobile under one of the sheds. Nearby, on the right, was the kitchen, built of rough stone like the house. An old woman had appeared in the door, and was curtseying to them. Winifred smiled a return.

"It is *Tia* Matilde," she explained. "The old man in the garden is *Tio* Diego, her husband. They live in that hut over there at the edge of the woods. They were the caretakers before we came. Matilde cooks for us and I help. We have a negro, Sam, to drive the car. They are our only servants. I think we could trust Diego, and I am sure of Sam. I brought him with me from Virginia when I left to join my father. Father came away from Richmond hurriedly."

She said this, Jimmy was convinced, with deliberate design. Her eyes were directed straight at him. But more than ever now he was determined to hold his secret fast.

"I know how it was with him," he said smoothly. "I made up my mind to sail one evening, and the next morning I was aboard ship at Baltimore pulling out into the stream. When a man's health calls for a change he doesn't stop to give a good-by tea-party to his friends."

Winifred's eyes dropped. She sighed, with relief Jimmy fancied. He went on easily:

"About Sam. I'll see that he has a gun too. I am going to ask Segovia to supply us with some rifles. He is—or was, rather—in the army, and he can get them without any troublesome questions. I really don't think we shall have a need for them—I don't see how any one is to find out where I bring Kaufman—but there's nothing like being prepared."

They had walked, while he was speaking, around to the west side of the house. The hill here fell away precipitously. Only a few feet of level ground intervened between the house and the verge. Below, the stream which Jimmy had crossed on his way to the farm wound toward them through immense reaches of undulating plains.

"We are safe from attack on this side anyway," he remarked. "The Pacific lies over in that direction, doesn't it?"

"Yes. You can see it, they say, from Mount Borazo, back from here a few miles. It is a dead volcano or, at least, it has been inactive for many years."

"A volcano! By George, that sounds enticing. I wonder if we couldn't take a trip to it some day when this Kaufman business is settled? Make a picnic of it, you and your father and Segovia and—" he smiled at the connection—"Miss Mary Taylor. I haven't told you about her. She's an American, a writer, doing the country for a magazine."

Winifred let the impossible suggestion pass, but she asked, with a spice of interest—

"Miss Taylor was a passenger on the boat with you?"

"No indeed. I met her only yesterday

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at the Banco Nacional. And again today as I passed Morales' house on my way out. She's a guest there. She gave me this posy I'm sporting."

He laughed, and loosened the rose from his coat, twirling it nonchalantly with his fingers.

"Shall we go around to the other side?" proposed Winifred.

Without waiting for his assent she moved off.

Jimmy babbled on.

"She's stunning; regular magazine-cover girl; yet there is something baffling about her. I can't quite make her out. Perhaps you can, Miss Winifred.".

She was silent for a step or two. Then:

"You forget," she said distantly, "that my father is a recluse. We see no one. It is only because of conditions that we are seeing you."

They had rounded the house by now. She spoke in the formal tone of a guide to his charge.

"The hill on this side, you note, slopes gradually to the Santa Marta Road. The road itself is hidden by the wild growth. The situation is retired and unfriendly. I think I have shown you all there is to be seen."

It was his *congé*. The suddenness of it jostled Jimmy's composure until he remembered that his errand was based on strictly impersonal grounds. He had trespassed beyond this, and had been properly rebuked.

"I won't thank you," he said gravely. "That would imply that I have taken your courtesy as personal to myself, when of course it is due to the cause we have espoused in common. I will endeavor to let you hear from me before I come with the guns. And when I shall know the night that I'm to have my try at Kaufman I will assuredly get word to you."

"I can help you there, perhaps," she said with equal gravity. "I will send Sam into town every day for the mail. He will be at the post-office from twelve until fifteen minutes after. I will give him your name. A line by Sam will come to me safely."

"That is fine," he told her. "Good-by."

He did not offer his hand; he went at once to his car. As he got into it he absently tossed the rose away. She stood as she was until he had disappeared over the crest of the hill. Her eyes traveled to the rose lying on the sparse turf. She smiled palely, and turned toward the door.

Jimmy piloted his machine down the wretched road to the gateway. He was in act of passing through it when an automobile shot up out of the gorge to the left. He recognized the car as Morales', and as it came up he received a bow from one of the two ladies in the tonneau. It was Miss Mary Taylor. The other was the Doña Morales.

Jimmy swore softly under his breath. Miss Taylor's bow, he fancied, was ironic.

"I lied to her, and she has caught me in it," he mourned to his wheel. "Funny how these things happen!"

TO BE CONTINUED

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Staggering Steve

by Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "He Smile, He Go to Sleep," "His Decennial Curse," etc.

"IF YOU'VE got to go to Eureka Creek in the morning," said the Old Roadhouse Man, "I'd advise you to hire an Eskimo Oomiak to Candle, and then climb aboard one of the big freight-teams that pull out over the Whipple Road. That's the longest way, but it's the easiest. The shortest and meanest way is from here, straight out over the niggerhead tundra, with a pack on your back. That's the way Whipple himself went at first. There's his very pack-strap hanging on the wall—singed."

We were sitting outside the roadhouse door in the day-night of the late Alaska Spring. The melting, grinding floe-ice had moved off shore, and the big disc of the sun seemed to be intrenched upon it, out there in the Arctic, and shooting red-gold rays at the splintered scarp of Cape Deceit. The water was like ruby glass; and there was stillness, except for the swish of the beach ripples and the Old Roadhouse Man's voice.

THERE'S quite a few horses in the country now, but when Whipple staked Eureka, back-packing was the only way we had to prospect. There were all sorts of contrivances that we harnessed on ourselves, but the packing itself didn't vary a bit—it was fierce! Whipple used that big canvas frame in there when he packed out grub and tools to his claim in May and June. Later on I heard reports of a strike on Eureka, but I didn't pay much attention—there were lots of such rumors up here in the new Arctic placer fields that first Summer.

Then things happened that brought him and Eureka back to my mind very suddenly—queer things that you'll mebbe hear of out there, all twisted, like past things are apt to get. I'll give them to you straight.

We had a cold Fall, without snow, and the bay was dull and seething with mush ice when the last schooner from Nome dropped her mud-hook in the clear water beyond, and put out a big dory. They pushed and shoved and paddled through the slush—the mate a-swearing in Skywegian. I never thought they'd make it, but they did; and they put ashore some supplies for me, and a half-froze woman, a girl, a small boy and a crated cat—farm folks and awful poor, I judged, from their clothes and the general look of them.

I took them into the roadhouse and warmed them, and when the blue got out of the woman's nice homely face it shone red and happy. She wanted to know right away where was Eureka Creek and Whipple.

"Oh," says I, "are you 'Staggering Steve's'

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woman?" And at that name—which he was called by around here—her lips fell apart and the under one wobbled. I explained quick:

"Not that kind of staggering it don't mean, ma'am. It's the way he loads himself." And I told her about his reputation for tackling things that were far and hard.

Her smile came back.

"That's Stephen—poor dear," she says. "But all that's over now. Of course you know he's struck it rich. We had a glorious letter from him to let everything go and come right up. There wasn't much left to let go," she says, with a kind of blushing laugh, "just enough to pay our passage without borrowing, I'm thankful to say. And now please do tell us all about Eureka Creek."

"Well, that ain't much," I says. "It's about the wildest of a lot of wildcat creeks that were staked in the stampedes last Fall and Winter. And I know about the talk of gold there, and that men who had claims on it have been going out there this Summer."

Well, that was all I did rightly know, though there was one man in from Eureka that I had talked to, a feller named Jack Ratigan—an ugly little old-timer that had a grub cache here. I remembered he claimed there was nothing on the creek, though he took out a pack of grub just the same. Of course there was no need to mention him.

She got right down to business then.

"We want to go out there at once," she tells me. "Mr. Whipple will pay whatever it costs—and twice over."

I knew it! That's what I was up against. And you can bet I felt pretty hostile to that man of hers for not coming down for them himself. But she said he wrote her he dassen't leave the claim for fear of jumpers. It was a three or four days' trip for them, and sleep out on the open tundra. Why, I wouldn't have dreamed of tackling it, only by good luck there was a pair of big, skinny horses—the first that ever was up here—turned out at the Cape, ready for slaughtering for malamute feed. So I borrowed them, rigged them out some way, and off we went.

I had the youngsters up on one old skate and the woman riding the other, back of the pack, when she wanted to. But she hiked most of the time, "like Stephen did." She seemed to like to soak herself full of the slippery, soggy misery of the niggerheads, for she had the picture I'd given her of him, laden and bent; and once or twice I heard her whisper to herself "Staggering Steve!" Lord, but nothing could damp her spirits; for day and night she saw her husband standing on the hump of a pure gold rainbow that spanned Eureka.

A bare, cold doing of time those trips are—over vast brown billows of earth. The only things you could call scenery would be a few stunted willows to make tea by, or a chance outcropping of lichen-stained rock which you hated to leave—seemed like a wayside shrine.

It was afternoon when we crossed a slow-curving height of land and looked down the long, empty, snaky waller that was the creek we were after. When I told her—

"Eureka, 'I have found it,' " she cheers. "The motto of our own Golden State. And Stephen he named it before ever he found the gold."

Stakes began to show up soon, and ax-marks on the willow brush, and a kind of wet trail. Then we saw tents. The first was empty, and the second. But at the third one—it was a kind of big mud hut, not a tent—there was five or six men standing around gazing at us. We paused a minute.

"Hullo, gentlemen," I greeted. "Hullo Big, hullo Kid."

They mumbled out some kind of "hullo" back. Their mouths were half-open—you'd of thought we were strange animals."

"Where's Staggering Steve?" I asked.

Big Chilberg starts to answer, and then answers different, as you might say.

"Who's dem?" he blurts.

"His woman and kids," I told him.

She gives a little bobbing bow to the bunch. One grabs a stick to whittle; one goes inside; one walks off; two more turns their backs and talks low. Big Chilberg jerks his thumb down creek:

"De next claim is Ratigan's, and de next is Discovery—dat's Steve's. He don't never leave de claim."

When we went on I looked back, and there those gumps were—drawn together again and staring at us.

Jack Ratigan, busy outside his tent, pretended not to see us coming till we were right on him.

"Hully, Ratty," I sings out as we shamble along.

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"'Lo," he grunts back at me. He didn't seem to look at the woman and kids.

RIGHT around a big bend we saw the house on Discovery—a small sod-built shack. And the three Whipples, they forged ahead. Staggering Steve stood in the doorway, a bony, stooped-over, middle-aged man, kind of ganted up, as you might say. Of course the girl and boy make him first, but he just smiles down at them, and puts his hands 'round their heads and under their plump chins; and they wait that way till the mother comes panting up, and he gives her the first kiss. He waves his hand to me, and they disappear inside the cabin. I didn't want to butt in on a meeting like that, so when I got the outfit unloaded I pikes back to Two Above.

As I passed One Above, Jack Ratigan comes out of his door with a skillet in his hand. He flips the bannock and scowls black at it and says—

"What in —— did you bring thim for?"

"What in ——'s business is that of yours?" I comes back at him.

The air 'round that creek was certainly glum. It didn't look like any bonanza to me.

I turned the big skates loose on Two Above and went into the hut. Old Bill Lowry seemed to own the claim. Anyway he was cooking supper for the other men there.

"Something to eat in a minute, roadhouse man," was all he said. And nobody else spoke a word.

There was several minutes of that.

A man is easy irritated when he's as tired as I was.

"Come out of it, you dog-gone mummies," I roars. "Talk. What's the matter? What you bumming for all afternoon? Where's the shafts or open cuts? Put me wise, can't you?"

"It's like this, Jim," says old Lowry quietly. "The word some way sprung up in Candle that Staggerin' Steve Whipple had struck big pay. You know the rest—we dropped everything and come. Say, if we're mummies, then Whipple must be the great-grandson of the original Sphinx! You couldn't pry any information out of him with a crowbar; and he never invited any one around his prospect holes. We dug considerable here and there on the rim, and would have cross-cut the creek, only Jack Ratigan had two shafts down in places where, if it was here at all, he'd be bound to strike it.

"But all the poor devil could raise was just the fly-speck colors that any schist bedrock in the country will show. Naturally, we begun to think that Steve had nothin', but was too proud to own up to it. But of course bringin' his family in means that he's got it all right—concealed somewhere! I suppose he didn't expect his folks in till we was froze out, —— him!"

Lowry gritted that out, and yet he was the most amiable looking of the crowd. It was sure an unhealthy prospect for Staggering Steve—the black faces around that supper table. I ate and got away quick, and started back for Whipple's cabin. I was plum up in the air over the whole thing. Steve hadn't seemed that kind of a duck to me. But you know gold!

I WOULD have knocked on the door, but as I come toward it, I saw in the dim light a man crouched by the window.

"A-ha," I says to myself, "they've sent some one already to overhear what he tells to his wife. Well, he'll have to report it straight, then."

For in a flash I made up my mind to listen at the other window. But before I cat-footed 'round the cabin I peered hard at this fellow. It was Jack Ratigan.

Inside, they were just finishing supper. Whipple's hair was combed slick, he had a necktie on, and he was composed and dignified like he was president of a swell banquet dinner. He sweeps the tin plates off to one end of the willow-pole table and rises.

"Now honey and little honeys," he begins, "I'll answer all your questions. This is the happiest day of my life. I never wrote you only cheerful things, did I, girl?"

"No, Stephen," says the wife.

"Well—now it's past and done—I got to tell you the full truth. I been mis'rable, more and worse all the time. Last Winter I worked for wages to prospect this creek, our last chance. In a drift underground I worked, sometimes on my knees in the slime, sometimes bent over and crouched under the low, frozen roof. When I'd straighten out in my bunk after a long day of that I'd want my sleep. But I wouldn't

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get it—too fagged out, and worrying constant over shoes for the little cold feet back home. I'd just lay and stare and say, 'Three years, three years, and me getting no younger.' I reckon I got some run down.

"Then in the Spring, when the sunshine came back, you might think I'd get the kinks outer my back. But no, I had to go prospectin' to Eureka, and that meant bending again under a pack. A pack! Three years—half the Winters and all the Summers—what kind of torturin' contraptions ain't I had a-grinding on my spine!

"That last trip to Eureka I had to take all the grub and outfit I had left, for the Summer was on me and I had to strike it—just had to, that's all. I was scared to weigh that pack on the steelyards. I could manage to stand up under it and wiggle off!

"To keep your balance, packing, you lean way over, and you get so used to doing that that when your pack is off and you got nothing to hold you back you topple forward on your face again and again. So you don't take it off when you rest. You just lay back on top of it. But with a heavy pack you've got to find a slanting place or you'd never get up again. Yet if it's too steep you don't get good rest. Say, dearie, I had all the restin' places located the whole fifty-three miles, and some of them was too far apart for the load I carried, and before I'd get to them——"

He put his hand to his forehead and wiped it.

"The sweat—it's cold sweat when you're near the end of even your deep-in strength—just keeps you clammy all the time. You got to say something to yourself to keep a-goin'—the alphabet, mebbe—slow. Or you drone the multiplyin' table, or perhaps speak some old piece about men that have stood up against big odds. Or even you try to remember some prayer to mumble. And all the time black motes that ain't gnats dance straight up and down before your eyes.

"God! Those last yards before you make your hill slope. You fall back on your pack and close your eyes—oh, it's just heaven for your body. You can hear your watch in your pocket—*tick*, *tick*, *tick*, *tick*—fast, like that—eating up your resting time! And you say out loud, 'just a minute more' and, 'just one more.' The shadow of your pack is creeping up your arm, and you swear that when it hits the button of your shirt-sleeve you'll sure mush on; and you do; but sometimes, to make yourself *really* git up, you have to imagine your wife and children is hungry more than a little. Toward the end——"

"I got here, honey—and fell in a heap, and struck my head against that door-jamb. The pain felt good! I never moved, just drank in rest through every pore of my hide; and it soaked clear through into my bones. My head still laid against the door post where it hit, but it was clearer than it had been for miles back, and I could look right into those two half-dug holes and see— And I went to sleep, lying there in my harness in the chill gray midnight.

"It was blazing day when I come to. I rubbed some of the stiffness out of me and then built a thawin' in both holes, and when I cleaned the embers out and picked into the gravel—there the nuggets were, just as I'd seen them the night before—thick!"

He stooped to the floor of slate, lifted a slab, and drew out a big baking-powder can.

"Thick," he repeats, his grave smile never changing. He takes the cover off the can. "Here's rest for your red, cracked hands, my girl; and for your old Steve's back. Yes, and a big ranch, with miles of grass for all played-out pack-critters."

With a sweeping gesture he throws the contents of the can rattling out on the table. *They were common yellow pebbles!*

It was a queer picture in the cabin. The children gazed at the scattered pebbles. The woman, after one glance, raised her frightened eyes to Whipple. Then, altogether, as if their feelings were fed by the same salt spring, the woman, the girl and the boy began to cry. The children looking at the table, the woman at her husband, the tears rolled down their wind-chapped faces.

Staggering Steve is puzzled. But when suddenly the little woman's head drops on her hands among the pebbles and she sobs, his face clears and he puts his hand on her hair.

"Weepin' for pure joy," he says, and smiles wide, now, like a boy.

When they see their mother break down that way, the children let out a howl like a couple of young malamutes; and they look reproachful at Steve, and the boy blubbers out—

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"Aw, pa, what did you fool ma for?"

At that the woman throws her head up quick and hushes them.

"Don't say a word," she says. "You don't understand."

Her mouth twists around and she feels for her apron—that ain't there—to dry her eyes on.

Staggering Steve's hands are playing among the pebbles.

"Look at 'em, honey," he coaxes, "ain't they pretty?"

She puts out trembling fingers and paws them, awkward.

"Yes, Stephen, they're b-beautiful," she quavers. "They're beautiful to me—you worked so, and suffered so——"

"We'll forget it," says he, "and face our glorious future." And he cuts loose with a great pipe dream.

He begins with a turnpike to Eureka, big steam thawers, and a ditch for hydraulicing; and she blinks and nods and tries to smile. But when he gets down to the fine house, and the wool clothes and rubber boots for George and Elsie, and the food and warmth and cheer, her wet eyes goes slowly 'round that empty, pitiful, mud shack, and she couldn't seem to stand it. Her face begins to work again, and she steals out of the cabin, while he goes on and on to the children, who are held as if by a fairy-tale.

She walks a little ways from the door and pauses there with hands extended. Light flakes were fluttering; and she being from California, mebbe the falling snow was new and terrible to her. She stares out into the black dome as if bewildered by an unreal world. Then she crouched to her knees in the whitening moss and I heard her softly call:

"God—God, are you here?" And she whispers, "Make me a good actor, God—and tell me what to do."

TO BE able to see her, I'd moved around back of the cabin to the corner of the other side, and by the glow from the window there I saw that Jack Ratigan's long neck was stretched out toward her, his big, ugly mouth was half-open, and his ugly little eyes were twitching. When the woman goes shivering back into the cabin he follows after her—a slow step at a time, like a man in a spell.

Their eyes went wide at him. In his long white parka, grime-stained, he looked like a dirty specter. His whole face was a-working; for the Celt in him had broke out—he was all Celt! He came to the table by Staggering Steve. With one hand he swept the pebbles into a heap; with the other he drew from his hip pocket a fat buckskin poke. He gave the string a jerk, and poured out dust and nuggets, and spread them, all glittering, over the table.

"Here, mum," he says in a choking growl, "take a squint at the rale thing. You're all fixed—don't take on, mum! The claim's all right, even if *he* ain't."

Staggering Steve bent over the table. His vacant smile was gone, and he was studying hard. He drew a few of the yellow pebbles back and mixed them with the nuggets and stirred them with his bony finger. And I saw the light of understanding come slowly to his eyes. He passed his hand across his forehead once or twice.

"Good God," he said, stepping back against the wall. And a real smile—in fact a kind of apologizin' grin—comes over his face. Mrs. Whipple stands up and trembles. Steve comes to the table and brushes the dirt and pebbles off on to the floor in a sneaky sort of way, and tips his wife a wink. She sways a second and then keels over.

Whipple picked his wife up quick, and she came out of it in a minute—clinging to him.

"It's been too hard a trip for you, honey," he says, and his voice, too, was more natural now.

Then he turns to Ratigan with eager questions.

"This pokeful here," the feller tells him, "is from the hole on the dividing line between my claim and yours. I got plenty more—a little finer—from my other shaft. It's a wide paystreak, Steve. Bench and creek, it'll run up and down a long ways."

I heard quiet feet. Several heads came close to mine at the window, and other men stole up to the door and listened. The bunch, impatient, had come to find out what was keeping their man!

Whipple, still questioning Ratigan, remembered something.

"But," says he, "I saw the boys go down in your shafts. Why don't they know?"

Ratigan leaned over the table.

"Think I'm that easy?" he says, fiercely. "Think I been a pack brute and a dirty mole for ten years for to let anny thing

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git by me now? I took up the bedrock dirt in thim holes at sly times, panned it clean, and tamped it back agin and lave it freeze. Not till then did I tell 'em I was down to bedrock and to come take a look for themselves.

"Steve, I been a friend to you this night. You been loco'd, and the raw gold put you right. Say nawthin'. They're going to pull out, disgusted—me too. But I'll come back, and on the first of the year you and me'll relocate the hull creek—hey, Steve?"

Staggering Steve had lit his pipe. He was himself again—never more himself, in fact, than when he answered:

"Nothing like that, Jack. They've been pack-brutes too, every one. Ain't there gold enough on Eureka for all of us?"

The door was pushed open and men entered. We at the window went in, too. Jack Ratigan sprang in front of the table to hide the sight of his gold-dust. It was old Lowry that spoke for the others—Lowry, frontiersman of the days when ill-faith of one meant the scalps of all.

"So it's not Steve, but you, you scum of th' yearth," says he, trembling with passion. "Figgered to git all our claims, did ye'? Hell yawns for swine like you!"

"Dere's one strong willer on my claim," growls out Big Chilberg.

"Willer nothin'," cuts in the 'Haw-haw Kid,' white with rage. "The shafts is nearer. Tie his windlass rope 'round his neck and let him down till his feet touches his careful tamped-in bedrock——"

"Then wind him up a foot or two and leave him swing," finishes 'Formation Jack.' They crowded forward, but the little woman she springs in front of Ratigan.

"Please, please," she says to Lowry, with clasped hands raised. "I don't know who this man is, but he's one that answers the prayers of the sorrowing. When I rose from my knees out there in the dank sod, this man, from somewhere in the dark and the snow, he followed me in and spread out this gold to the eyes of my poor husband, and behold—like a miracle he grew right again in his mind. Oh, leave him be," she begs, distracted, "and Stephen and me will give our claims for him."

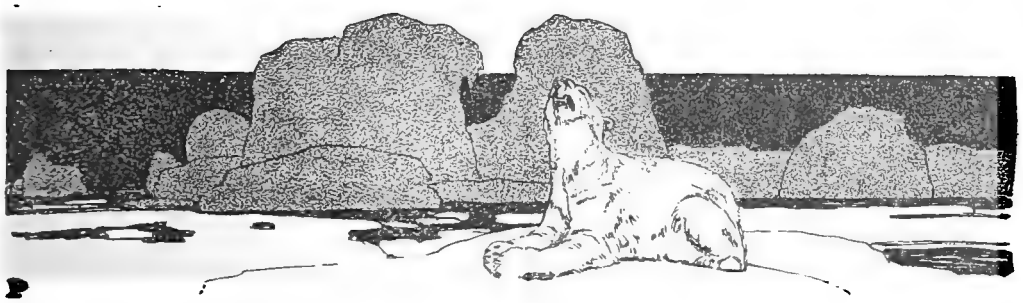
Staggering Steve here lays one hand on Ratigan's shoulder. The other he holds up high for quiet.

"Beasts of burden all," says he, clear and calm, "This gold goes to our heads, sometimes! I made you think there was gold when there wasn't. He let you think there wasn't when there was. It's up to him and me to build a road out here. Then—beasts of burden no more—all of us can walk up straight."

Those words of his—and hers—they sunk. Some looks were passed among the men, and then Lowry opened the door and Ratigan went free.

I GLANCED questioningly at the singed pack-strap on the wall. The Old Roadhouse Man laughed.

"Well, the evening that Mrs. Whipple bust a bottle of real champagne on a rock in the Whipple Road, she gets the boys to collect all the pack-straps in a heap, and they set fire to them. But she changes her mind—of course—and snatches Steve's out, smothers the flame, and sends it down to me by a special messenger."



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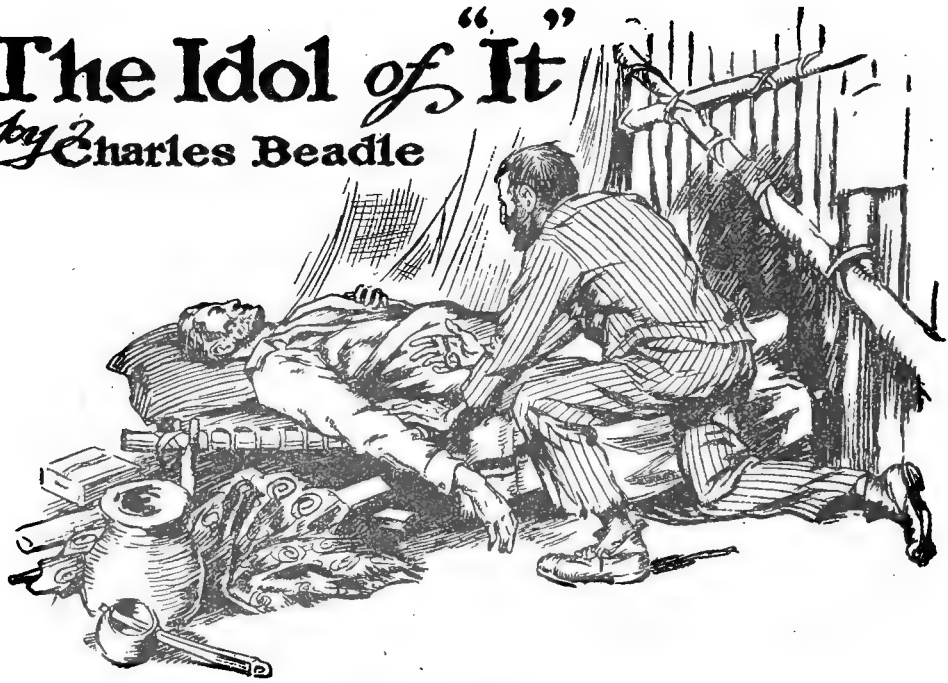
The Idol of "It"

by Charles Beadle



Author of "The Christman."

MIGHTY trees that yearned toward an incandescent sky appeared to have arisen in a mushroom effort of a night, dragging creepers from their beds; creepers that hung in tearful longing for the sun shut out by giant arms. And in this weeping vastness of humid green, ever muttering, ever rustling with strange animals and birds of dazzling hues, was a clearing, resembling a singed spot in a woolen blanket, upon which a village huddled like a group of brown hens fearful of the forest swamp.

The air was saturated with yellow-green stench. A screech preceded a flash of scarlet as a parrot fled the forest to the chattering of monkeys. Before a hut were two women whose breasts of plumbago swayed rhythmically as they ground corn between two stones, and beside them sprawled three infants, potbellied, with heads like polliwogs, near tiny fowls roosting dejectedly; beyond, a scraggy man whose tufts of wool were like ashes on a cold grate, squatted, paring arrows.

In front of a round hut less tattered than the others sat a ragged bearded white man, scrawny and stockily built. Over the unkempt mane hovered flies; flies laboring like ships in a sea amid the growth exposed by the buttonless dirty shirt, flies circling meaninglessly 'round the bare ankles between the frayed pajamas and the soggy boots. As one more daring settled upon the dark lashes, the pale eyes in the blood-sapped face lost the reflection of eternity—he winked; and as if the spell were broken stuck a stubby pipe between yellow teeth.

The several scratches of the damp matches were discordant in the harmonic silence. Blue smoke streaked to a fairy tent—and faded lazily. The movement as he stretched out a leg seemed a convulsion. The pipe roosted like some strange bird in the nest of his beard. Again a parrot screeched tearfully; a lugubrious cry was strangled by the forest; women clucked like a dripping tap; and still the white man sat staring—staring as the violet shadows streaked across the village.

In the hut, on an empty box labeled "Armour, Chicago," was a gin-bottle in which a guttered candle bowed gravely to a clutter of mildewed illustrations from a Sunday supplement pinned on the thatched wall above a bed, a white man's bed inasmuch that it was off the ground

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and had frayed remnants of a mosquito-net.

When the sun had cooled to lemon the air moved, a sigh which stirred a hair on the man's moist brow. He yawned. The wet chorus of the frogs and the pæan of the mosquitoes had begun when the cook clad in a greasy loin-cloth passed with the dinner into the hut.

Replacing the candle from a store kept in a calabash of water, the cook set the table by dumping down a cracked tin plate and mug beside a mess of boiled yams and a can of salmon and departed with the fly-blown beef. Into this room shambled Carl Pieters. Propping the remnant of the three-year-old magazine against the revolver, he slid food into his mouth mechanically.

He read the advertisement of a shaving soap for the hundredth time with undiminished interest, automatically wiping the sweat from his brow and dabbing a lean finger at a flying beetle, pushing a golden-green moth from his fork, brushing off a fantastic spider prowling on five-inch legs across the table. To a sphinx-like girl squatting beside him wrapped in bright trade-cloths, he handed the remains of his meal, which she gobbled greedily.

As a cricket in the roof broke into shrill joy Pieters grabbed a mug, kicked the stool from under him and shambled across to the bed, grunting at the girl. She rose as effortlessly as an animal and brought a bottle of gin and a calabash of water. The gurgle of liquor sounded refreshing. Sitting on the bed he drank at a gulp, poured more, and handed the mug to the girl who imitated him eagerly.

The pipe was lighted. Pieters drank again, and drinking, began to mutter to himself; low and unintelligible at first but growing with each gulp more rapid and still louder until, with pale eyes alight, he gesticulated and chattered at the empty air above the head of the girl squatting motionless beside him—broke into a cracked and forgotten song, seeming to weave the sound of his own voice about him in a comforting net of companionship.

Twice the girl rose and replaced the candle stub; drank beside him but never with him, and spoke no word. The liquid croak, the high hum, the creak and mutter of the forest and the cricket's shrill plaint, were punctuated by the rusty laugh and mutter and the gurgle of liquor in a tin mug. The spluttering light cast mystic shadows of blue, flashed on the wings of insects and gleamed on the moist flesh of black and white.

Once, rising suddenly, he pointed with the stubby pipe at the mildewed picture of a Broadway star and hiccuped:

"You—" While the arm seemed to wait in ludicrous anxiety he lost the words: then, "God!" he exclaimed, and sat upon the bed with an air of relief.

And so the green night labored on. With the snuffing of the candle by a blunt black finger the white man slept stertorously upon the bed and the girl curled up like some great cat, upon the floor beside him.

II

AT THE hour of the monkey when the hot stars melt, Pieters stirred, sighed and rubbed off the sweat of the night with grimy paws. Out in the village figures moved and voices muttered and as the damp shadows retreated to their lair in the forest he shambled from the hut, scratching, to unlock the store and squat by the kitchen fire to drink stewed tea.

Thrice in two hours he ordered natives to open certain bales, swore for the pleasure of hearing his own voice, and settled down to watch the mist rising from the swamp like steam from a wet blanket set before a fire. At last through the weeping murmur of the forest came a faint call. Pieters shifted the pipe from one side of his mouth to the other. Again came the cry, tremulous, which brought the villagers hustling out like chicks at the chirrup of a hen.

Within half an hour an ebon figure, balancing a load upon his head, broke from the gloom of the forest as abruptly as a woodchuck emerging from his hole; and arousing a flutter and startling the pipe from Pieters' mouth, followed a hammock swung on a bamboo pole borne by two porters.

As the hammock reached the store the caravan was still uncoiling from the forest like some gigantic serpent. The shadow of surprise in Pieters' eyes deepened to resentment as he listened to the head man explaining that his white man was very ill. Pieters looked down at the emaciated face staring vacantly; peered at the crowd of

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curious natives as if seeking the solution of a problem, stuck the pipe in his mouth, shifted it from one side to the other and, still muttering, led the way to the hut.

While the stranger was being dumped on the bed Pieters, cursing the men's clumsy movements, fumbled beneath the bed at a japanned box. From the rows of glass tubes labeled "calomel," "laudanum," "arsenic" he selected quinine and phenacetin and a clinical thermometer. The taking of the temperature seemed to increase his efficiency; for the sick man's head was raised to have tabloids and water forced between the parched lips with a solicitous tenderness. As the sweat-blackened clothes were removed deftly, a golden locket on a chain about the neck swung loose. With a monkey-like grab Pieters seized upon it. His eyes changed queerly as he examined a delicately wrought miniature upon ivory. At the cluck of astonishment from the girl he dropped the locket as if it had stung him.

When the sick man had been bundled naked between trade blankets, the cook was set to making tea. Pieters returned to the store. But the sullen resentment had veered to a softness alien to that shaggy face; he muttered much. Then about nine o'clock he forsook the work of bartering copper wire, beads and cloths for rubber and ivory, to stride back to the hut. At the door patiently crouched the girl.

Ordering her to the kitchen for more tea he went over to the bed. Steadfastly he gazed at the stubble-cheeked face and grunted interrogatively. The staring eyes made no sign of comprehension. A claw-like hand slid swiftly beneath the blankets. The ape-like intensity, as if cocking the ears, was broken as Pieters thrust back the locket at the first slap of feet. Again with feminine tenderness the head was raised and beef-tea fed with a spoon.

Beside the bed, within reach of a heap of raw tobacco leaves, the stubby pipe smoking from the nest of his beard, the eyes upon the form swathed in blankets with the fixity of a yogi, squatted Pieters as the day dripped from noon to eve, and while the forest sobbed a sad nocturne the sick man tossed and raved; raved of a woman with eyes of blue and flaxen hair, whose muttered name was snatched and echoed mystically by the ugly-bearded trader as he laved the parched brow with dirty rags soaked in tepid water.

When the candle's spluttering yellow had been swallowed by the green of dawn, a shadow flecked the gray eyes. They peered with sane demand. A feeble hand fluttered on a plundered breast. A weak voice murmured querulously—

"Say, did you see—a locket—'round my neck?"

"No," grunted Pieters, staring stonily.

"I wouldn't have lost that for—for——"

The voice trailed away. The troubled gaze wandered 'round the hut. A point of minor importance stirred the fevered brain.

"Where am I?" he inquired, one hand fumbling feebly beneath the blankets.

"Trade store."

"Can't remember—gee, I must ha' been bad, huh?"

"Ugm—rubber?"

"Nope. Mining engineer," explained the stranger weakly. "Warner P. Chesters. I was on my way to the Kilo mines; then I got sick. How far from here?"

"Three weeks."

"When did they bring me in?"

"Yes'day."

"Can't remember." Chesters blinked. "Been here long?"

"Six year."

"Gee!" Then turning pleading eyes, "Say, you sure didn't see that locket when they brought me in?"

Pieters grunted negatively.

"Ah—I wouldn't ha' lost that for—for—Guess those durned coons swiped it, huh?" He sighed and stared at the yellow square of sunlight. "Oh, God blast these flies!"

Pieters shambled over to souse a rag in water, laved the sick man's face, mumbled "beef tea" and shuffled out. But at the cook he growled gutturally and continued on down the path across the swamp, striding like a lover hastening to a tryst. On the fringe of the forest where the creepers, specked with brilliant orchids, hung like a curtain, he glanced back at the village, one hand hugging his shirt-front; then he dived into the damp shadows. From the mottled green of a tree a blue-faced monkey peeked at this hairy white man squatting on a gnarled root peering at a miniature set in gold, peering with eyes which clouded as he whispered raspingly.

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At the screech of a parrot or a rustle of leaves the locket was thrust within the shirt, the head quirked with the furtive quickness of the monkey in the tree. So amid the weeping creak of the forest, Pieters, stubby pipe clutched in one hand, the pink pajamas green-streaked with slime, crouched over the portrait of a woman whom he had never seen, muttering the name stolen from her lover's lips.

Pieters emerged from the pall of the forest walking as if the pæan of the frogs and crickets were a wedding-march. In the violet shadows of the hut he bent cautiously over the aquiline nose and clear-cut mouth smudged with golden stubble. The eyes narrowed to a glare of childish hate; he sighed between clenched teeth.

The entrance of the cook sent him scuttling like a scared ape, bursting into violent abuse. Then he grabbed a bottle of gin with one hand, deftly knocked off the head, gulped a stiff tote and fell to pacing the hut, hugging the locket in two hands to his breast, muttering. Again he bent over the sick man suspiciously, listened to the breathing; stole swiftly to the door to snatch a glance at the miniature, and strode on to the table for more gin, mumbling queer oaths and caresses.

When the hot bowl of the night had descended he fumbled for a candle with one hand, pawing at his sweaty brow as he glared at the pictured face. When the cook again ventured to the door an empty bottle sent the boiled yams flying; the girl fled, shrinking.

So while the tropic night pulsed the warm complaint the man drank and cursed and blessed; and as his steps grew more uncertain they grew faster until he ran from bed to table spewing out his soul.

As the moth-choked candle spluttered to an end the hairy features were bent so close upon the sick man that the breath disturbed the slumberer who whispered—

"Peggy!"

The stocky form in the dirty shirt and pink pajamas seemed stricken with an ague. The lean hands fluttered like evil bats. The twisted lips jibbered and the locket fell upon the blankets. Then the figure reeled, swerved and pitched headlong.

Beside the bed, his bleeding head among the bottles, Pieters sobbed himself to sleep.

III

IN THE stew of the late morning Chesters awoke thirsty and fly-pestered. Automatically he grabbed at his bare chest—but the loss was no dream. He tried to lick his parched lips and heaved on to one elbow. A hard substance touched his arm. With a stifled exclamation he drew the gold chain from a fold in the blanket. As he gazed eagerly at the locket a movement brought his eyes to see Pieters, pipe in mouth, mug in hand, regarding him somberly.

"Gee!" ejaculated Chesters, "I've found it!"

Pieters thrust the mug at him. Chesters drank thirstily of tepid tea and sank back. He clutched the locket and smiled as radiantly as a boy.

"Guess it must ha' got tangled up somehow. My, I am glad! Say," he went on, passing a white hand over the moist forehead to dislodge flies, "you've been dandy to fix me up." He paused and looked embarrassedly at the morose figure. "Sit down, won't you. I want to thank you—an' we oughter get acquainted, huh?"

Pieters squatted against the jamb of the door. Chesters fidgeted with the locket. He rolled toward his host.

"You know I'm feelin' good and sorter want to talk my head off. Durn it, I haven't had a word with a Christian since I left Phillipville two months ago! Gosh, you must be pretty lonesome here, huh?"

"Ugm!" grunted Pieters.

"No! Gotter pardner somewheres?"

Again Pieters grunted negatively.

"For land's sakes what d'you do? When did you last have a chat?"

"Five year."

"Five years!" Chesters stared incredulously at the shaggy profile against the yellow glare. "God, I should be off my head. How long have you been in this Godforsaken country?"

"'Leven."

"And before you came to this death hole?"

"Tchad."

"Where's that? Further up? Ya? Trading, I suppose? But ain't you never going back? What?"

"Got me."

"What's got you? The country? Say, don't you ever want to chew the rag with a fellow Christian?"

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"Ugm." Pieters removed his pipe, stared at the wall and uttered a sentence: "After a bit it gets you—and you can't."

"It—it?"

Chesters stared with a scared look at the man; the eyes were queer—as if seeing things; the hairy arms and chest, even the position, apelike. The flies buzzed. The dripping murmur of the forest seemed more intense. Unconsciously Chesters clutched the locket tighter.

"Say," he began again with a rush, "I'm on contract—up there—Kilo—for two years. God, I'll be glad to get through. But it means a lot—and means her at the end." Pieters' head quirked. "Peggy's worth even two years of hell."

He kissed the locket. Pieters grunted jerkily.

"Here, have a look! She'll do you good!" As Chesters held out the locket a hairy paw snatched at it. "Ain't she a peach, now? If you only had a girl like that over the other side I'll bet all hell wouldn't keep you here!"

He laughed cheerfully. The shaggy head bent over the miniature.

"God, I got a turn when I thought I'd lost it! Why, Peg would never forgive me! I gave her one like that. The same fellow did both. Fine, huh? My, she'd throw a fit if she saw me like this," running a thin hand over the golden stubble. "Still, fever's not much, is it? I mean you never die from it—not often, huh? You seem pretty fit anyway. Say, how old are you?"

"Thirty," jerked Pieters without looking up.

"Thirty! God, I thought——"

He stared incredulously at the ragged mane flecked with gray, the eye sockets as wrinkled as a dried bladder. The inference startled him; anxiety grew. At length he appeared to observe the absorbed interest in the miniature with a tinge of jealousy. He held out his hand, but the old man of thirty heeded him not.

"Say——"

Pieters turned his head without raising it. The gleam of yellow fangs suggesting the warning snarl of a dog whose bone is threatened, propped Chesters' eyelids; but the snarl died in a grunt, the eyes were averted as a skinny claw held out the locket. Chesters dropped the chain 'round his neck with a hurried action. He lay back batting irritably at the flies. But the sense of constraint faded. He broke out again—

"Say, d'you know Vermont?"

Receiving no response he rolled toward Pieters whose eyes were lifted morosely at the incandescent sky.

"God," muttered Chesters aloud, "he looks like an idol forever staring at God!"

Pieters' head turned slowly. He regarded him solemnly and as gently turned away. The queerness of the man had crushed out an idea which startled Chesters; and inhibited the desire to chatter. He stared up at a clay nest from which wasp-like flies ployed busily in and out the hut. Occasionally came a mutter from the village; a parrot's screech seemed to tear the steamy silence. Again he peered at Pieters. An impulse welled to break that awful immobility.

"Say, d'you know Vermont?" he demanded irritably.

But the placidity of the eyes was not flecked by the question. Chesters appeared to gulp; then the dammed flood broke.

"I was born and raised in Vermont——"

Batting at flies, fidgeting with the locket, hastily sipping tepid tea, he reeled out the story of his life with a ludicrous determination; straying from the narrative to relate vague incidents of vaguer people, chuckling till he perspired the more at futile anecdotes.

The hours dripped on. The girl slithered in and out with tea. Pieters drank and smoked and stared unheeding—until Chesters came to the meeting with a slim young woman with flaxen hair and eyes of blue. Then Pieters grunted. He turned his shaggy head to watch the golden-stubbled boy, doped by the music of his own voice, with the patient eyes of a cat at a mouse-hole.

Yellow heat merged into sapphire heat.

Exhausted by his half-told tale Chesters sank to greasy sleep. Pieters ate his dinner unread and fell upon the gin bottle, drank and muttered and mumbled. Once he leaned over the bed, listened to the troubled breathing and with crooked fingers, tugged tentatively at the golden chain; but at the stirring of the sleeper he pranced aside.

With convalescence irritation grew; the sinister stare got on Chesters' nerves. His gusts of talkativeness became fitful; were squashed by the weight of taciturnity

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which seemed allied with the dripping silence. When relieved of Pieters' presence he would gaze at the miniature for comfort, unconscious that he talked aloud.

ON THE following afternoon he got up and took a sponge-down in his own India-rubber bath. Pieters came in and watched him. He had put the locket and chain upon the table, but when Pieters sidled up Chesters snatched at it, impelled by a spasm of unaccountable terror which brought an echo of the canine snarl. Suddenly Chesters announced that he would leave on the morrow. Pieters grunted. More than an hour later Pieters' hand closed on Chesters' forearm.

"Don't go," he said. "Stop."

Chesters stared in amazement at the note of pleading in his voice.

"Why—but say, guess you've fixed me good an' I can't sponge on you forever."

"Weak," muttered Pieters, insistently.

"Sure. But guess I can use the hammock, huh? Let go!" he snapped, irritated by the persistent hurt of the talon-like grip.

He wrenched away his arm.

The flare of temper sparked an answer in Pieters' eyes. For a second they glared at each other; Pieters turned away, mumbling a monosyllable—

"It."

"Plumb dippy!" muttered Chesters aloud. "It? What in —— does the boob mean?"

He glared at the broad back of Pieters who was fumbling with the medicine-chest beside the bed.

"Sure, I'll hit the trail tomorrow!" he added as Pieters left the hut with a tube of white tabloids.

"What in —— did I ever come to this death-hole for?" He dawdled about the hut, muttering pettishly. "Durned boob's as mad as a hatter!" he announced aggrievedly as he sat on the bed at sunset. "God, if Peggy could see this outfit it'ud scare her stiff. Sure, this is the damndest hell-spot on earth. If I don't get out I'll go—" He stopped with a jerk, suddenly conscious that he was chattering aloud. "By ——," he muttered, rising agitatedly, "it's getting me!" Then with a rush: "God! It! *That's* what he meant!"

He stood at the door listening, like a startled animal. In the village the orange of a fire was smutted with dim figures; the serried huts were black cones against the hot stars. Under the whimper of the forest came a child's fitful cry, guttural undertones. The cricket who lived in the roof shrilled behind him. He started and glanced back at the darkened interior, shaken by an indefinable fear as clammy as the sweaty air. Clutching at the locket he took a step forward.

"Gee, I wonder what Peg's doing—and dad and mother! Just to think of Bomaseen Lake, Vermont—and this!"

His gust of laughter came back like a boomerang and scared him; the humid croak mocked him.

"Gosh, my nerves are giving. If I don't get out—" He stoppered his lips; and then unable to resist clinging to the sound of his own voice: "God, I must pull myself together. It's nothing. Oh ——, where has that boob got to?"

He peered 'round the hut and saw the glow of another fire. On his haunches was Pieters stirring a pot with an iron spoon; behind him squatted the girl. Chesters paused on the threshold, thankful for the smoke protection from the mosquitoes.

"Dinner," grunted Pieters without looking up.

Soothed by the presence of another white Chesters began to muse on the absurdity of his nervous irritability; and as for Pieters, who wouldn't be "queer" in this stewing solitude? Shouting to the cook who padded down from the village fire, Pieters rose and took Chesters' arm gently, muttering—

"Good dinner—eggs!"

Chesters laughed, amused at the idea of eggs, the eternal eggs and fried chicken of the Congo, being "good." Pieters fumbled around and lit four candles which he stuck on the table. The cook brought in the tin plates and mugs. With quaint clumsiness Pieters thrust the camp-stool upon the guest and dragged up a box for himself. Then he smiled, a stiff contortion only saved from a snarl by the relative softness of the eyes, as he said—

"Feast!"

The smile persuaded Chesters that a joke was intended. Again he laughed. Instantly the eyes clouded angrily.

"Say, don't get sore," remarked Chesters hurriedly. "I was thinking of oysters and champagne! Some feast, huh?"

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Pieters grunted, poured gin and raised his mug.

"Here's to!" exclaimed Chesters, eager to placate, and drank, conscious that his touchy host was regarding his chest instead of meeting his eyes. The uneasiness returned; he fidgeted. Pieters pushed a tin plate of scrambled eggs before him.

"Made myself," he grunted.

Chesters began to eat, and hesitated.

"Mighty bitter," he remarked, grimacing.

"Good—salt—very good," said Pieters very insistently, munching the stew of boiled yams and corned beef. In the splutter of light the feline glint of the eyes was imperious. Reluctantly Chesters bolted the mess and washed away the acrid taste with a swig of gin and water. To his surprise he ate the meat and yams with relish.

"Gosh," said he, "that salt's given me a thirst. But I am feeling fit. I think I'd like a smoke."

Pieters grunted and contorted his lips to another smile as he poured liquor. Chesters laughed good humoredly and drank.

"Say," he remarked as he rolled a cigaret, "I'm all right now, so I guess you'd better have your own bed, huh? I'll get my boy to make——"

"Guest," mumbled Pieters.

A shadow of the ugly look decided Chesters to humor him. He crossed to the bed and lay down. Pieters squatted in his favorite position by the door.

"Guess I've got another touch of fever coming," remarked Chesters, abandoning the third cigaret. "Hellish thirsty—and I feel a bit queer too."

He finished another drink greedily and lay quiet, staring at the roof. Pieters shambled about replacing the candle stubs and squatted by the door again, the bottle beside him. Once as if conscious of the persistent stare, Chesters opened heavy-lidded eyes.

"Sure that booze has gone to my head," he remarked vaguely. "I'm durned sleepy."

Pieters grunted and drank.

On the bed Chesters' stubble and hair gleamed like a golden aura around the pallid face. One hand clutched the locket within the shirt. The music of the forest pulsed steadily. Flying beetles and moths whirred and charged the spluttering candles; a gigantic spider crawled slowly up the bed-head and poised on the edge of the pillow stuffed with leaves. The girl slithered in: Pieters poured gin for her; she drank and vanished at a guttural command.

Chesters' eyes opened slowly; the moist features grimaced as the hand slid to the pit of the stomach.

"——!" he muttered and groaned lingeringly. "God, I feel bad."

The limbs were stretched in a slow yawn and relaxed. Chesters rolled over with glistening eyes.

"Say, what's the matter with me? Get me some water, will you—or something? for God's sake! ——, I'm bad."

The crouching figure by the door did not move or respond. The man on the bed half-rose. He fell back with a scream, clutching his stomach. Again were the muscles stretched as on a rack. Once more he turned. The eyeballs were distended. The rigor seized him, tore hoarse shrieks which could not break the immobility of the shaggy figure by the door.

The spider moved; reared; and poised motionless upon the moist brow.

Pieters stood up.

IV

MIGHTY trees that yearned toward an incandescent sky, giant limbs draped with weeping creepers of humid green, ever muttering, ever rustling with strange animals and birds of dazzling hues—and a clutter of brown cones stewing.

In the hut the box-lid nailed upon a tree-stump was decked with clean newspapers. The earthen floor was swept and garnished with reed matting. The grass walls were hung with gay trade-cloths. The window and the door were clothed in muslin. A mosquito-net was bunched above a bed cool with strips of calico sewn into sheets.

Upon a white pillow stuffed with feathers leaned a white man whose shaven face seemed shrunken and was crossed with tiny gashes; whose gray-shot hair was cut in clumsy furrows; whose skinny hands, clean and nail-pared, stuck out from a suit of blue serge, new and rumpled, surmounted by a rubber collar decorated with a tie of pink and green—a white man who gazed with gleaming eyes at a miniature set upon the wall, a miniature in gold of a woman with flaxen hair and eyes of blue to whom he talked—and laughed and talked.

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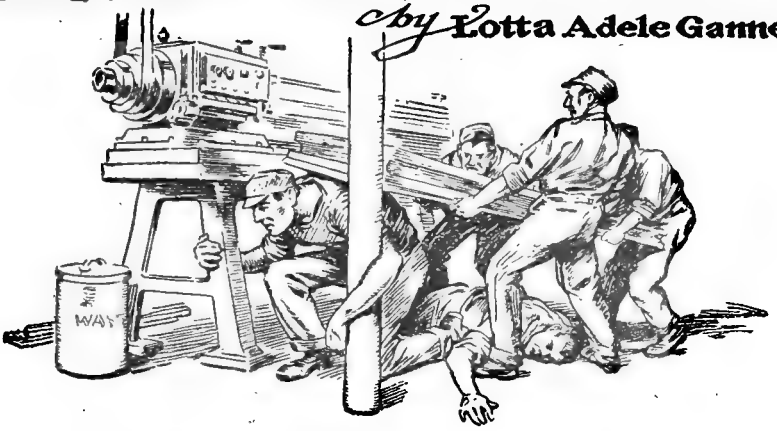
When Jim Came Into His Own

by Lotta Adele Gannett



AT THE shop they called him "Bull" Graham because of his great strength. An enormous man, six-feet-three, he carried his two hundred and thirty pounds with agile ease. His wide shoulders were carried well back, his head with its thick mop of graying hair, was held to one side with what would have given him an arrogant look had it not been for the wide smiling mouth and twinkling blue eyes—eyes that could flash steel sparks in the batting of a lid.

His eyes were not smiling now, nor flashing blue sparks; instead they held cold contempt, disdain, which cut to the quick its object, his son a youth of nineteen, who, sitting at the evening meal, listened with blanched face to the words which fell white hot from his father's lips. Bull was addressing his wife, a fragile little woman with gentle eyes and soft light hair which waved back from a brow as unwrinkled as a child's.

"And he took the blow! Your son, *my* son, that!" nodding toward the youth who gulped wretchedly. "I've been watching this wop and I thought, 'He'll go too far some day and the kid'll wade in and slam him plenty.' I couldn't get it into my head that a child of mine could be a coward, not even when he let the dago get away with putting a handful of filings down his back. I just couldn't believe it was from fear."

He looked at his son with withering scorn.

"And today—" Bull pulled at the collar of his blue shirt— "today when the wop slapped him in the face with a handful of oil, he went down. I excused that—a fellow can lose his balance on a little thing, but I waited—heart ready to bust, for him to get up and pulverize that dago—and he wiped his face with his sleeve *and walked away!*"

The youth kept his eyes on his plate. Not for worlds would he whine that his head had struck a piece of steel when he fell and that his head was whirling when he rose. What would be the use—there had been other times when he was not dazed and he had not fought. And still he could not think his father was right and he was a coward. He was sure it was not fear that kept him from taking "a fall out of the Italian."

It was a something that would not let him strike a blow in anger. Slow to anger, generous and quick to forgive, he had never felt like fighting. Dimly he felt this, but he could not voice it to his virile father.

He admired his father and glowed at the tales of his prowess told by his shopmates. He thrilled with pride when "Big Jack" Weatherby said he'd rather be kicked by a mule than hit by Bull. He never tired of listening to his gentle little mother tell of the memorable occasion at Atlantic City when a crowd of rowdies started to rough-house on one of the piers. As she told the tale, her voice grew warm and her cheeks took on color.

"I was sitting at the railing just over the beach, all of twenty feet below us, your father was standing looking for some friends we were to meet, when the howling, fighting mob surged toward us. 'Don't be

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frightened, girl,' he said, thinking of me first as always. I thought my heart must cease beating with terror as the whirling mass crashed to where I was sitting. It came so quickly there was no time to move.

"Your father braced himself against the railing and as the crazy mob came within reach, he stretched out his two arms that were like steel rods those days, and the nearest man was jerked from his feet and with a single movement hurled over the railing to the beach below. The next met the same fate, and the next. Four went before the rest realized what was happening, and then the fifth man shot a terrified glance at the black depth below and jumped back just in time. The fight was over and the manager of the pier rushed over and wanted to hire your father as trouble-queller at twenty-five dollars a week.

"He refused, of course, for your father is ever a man of peace. He smiled, dropped the end of his cigar that had stuck in his mouth all the time—the other end had fallen off, bitten through—and laughingly waved away the crowd that would have carried him on their shoulders. If you think it was a light thing he did, you should try to lift a full-grown man through a crowd by the shoulders."

Jim's mind came from this memory to hear his father's quiet tones which bit like no amount of storming could.

"Look at him nineteen years old and filling out to one-eighty, and afraid of a —— little wop five-feet-six!"

Jim could stand no more. He rose, swallowing vainly at a lump, his white face working, and rushed from the room.

"You are harsh with him, James," the little mother said when her son had gone. "You forget the lad has my blood as well as yours. My father was a Quaker, you know, and was ever a man of peace."

"He was," Bull broke in, "he was ever a man of peace and yet single-handed he licked a gang of foreigners who spit on the flag."

The little woman's eyes sparkled.

"He did. But he was riled, and that was but once in his life. Father was not a coward, but he liked not to fight. It is so with my laddie, I'm sure. He is no coward. I know my son, and now I must go to him, you have sore wounded him, James; he sets such store by you."

The gentle little wife placed her cheek for a fleeting second on the heavy crop of hair as though she felt her reproof might have been too strong.

"I don't think it's that I'm afraid, mother," Jim told her, "I just can't bring myself to strike a blow. I've tried to please father, and I can't."

"I know, son," she soothed, "you just go along as you are doing. When the time comes, you will prove that my son is no coward. I know my boy!"

The boy smiled at her gratefully, but his heart was sore.

Jim went to work next morning with his fine young head that seemed to be the masculine of his mother's, drooped before the glances of mingled pity and scorn that came from his and his father's workmates.

"Young Brownie"—so called because his father was logically "Old" Brownie—sidled up to Jim and laid a greasy jumper sleeve across the young man's shoulder, having to reach considerable up to do it.

"Say, Jim," he said, spitting through his teeth, "why don't you sail in and knock that wop loose from his habits?"

"I don't know, Jess," Jim said simply, "I suppose I should, but I just can't."

"You can't be afraid. With your size and weight, you ought to be able to lick your weight in fleas. If you ever swung at him and missed he'd get pneumonia from the draft. You ought to do it for three reasons, your old man's sake, your own and mine. I swiped that dago's lunch one afternoon and he had peanut butter sandwiches; bee-lieve me, I hate the innards of a man who eats salve sandwiches."

Jim smiled, as Brownie meant he should.

Above all things hated by men who toil with their hands, and who labor at iron-work, is a coward, and as the days passed, Jim was aware of the thinly veiled contempt the men felt for him. They were extra kind to his father, as people are kind to one who has suffered a bereavement. Bull passed his son with averted eyes and Young Brownie waxed emphatic and impatient as the days passed and Jim did nothing to silence the bragging of the dago that he had put the "big stiff" out. Jim was silent, but the iron bit into his soul.

THE climax came when the Italian, waxing bold in his unchecked career, tormented Jim a whole day through. He pushed the grinning foreigner away when he dabbed his cheek with an oily

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hand, took off his shirt and shook out the steel filings placed within by the same playful person, and without comment wiped the handles of his machine which the wop had greased with black oil.

It was a shaking Bull Graham who awaited his son that night outside the shop and clutched him by the shoulder as he appeared. Bull's face was white as he spoke through his shut teeth—

"This is where you fight, you cur, and lick your man or get licked, and I don't give a —— which!"

The Italian appearing just then, and seeing this tableau grim as death, would have fled but that Bull was too quick for him and gripped his arm with fingers of steel.

"Now, you skunk," he snarled, "you like to fight so well, go in and lick that big boob if you can—or get the licking of your life."

Jim didn't want to fight. He looked vainly for an avenue of escape. Looked vainly for some one in the circle of grim faces who could understand. He saw the Italian's eyes flash, saw his lips open over his white teeth and dodged as instinctively as one would from an open knife, and at that instant the wop sprang. He caught Jim with a stiff arm blow on the point of the jaw, and followed it up quickly with a close left hand blow on the same spot. Jim was recoiling at the instant the Italian landed his blow and the impact threw him. He struck his head on the cement step and lay there.

Somebody emptied a bottle of milk over him, there being no water handy, but his father spat at his prostrate body and without a backward glance strode homeward.

When Jim reached home he went straight to his room, and to his mother's admonition that he must hurry as she was dishing up, he made no reply. A look at his drooping shoulders, a glance at her husband's hard face, and Patience Graham put down the dish she was filling and followed her son upstairs.

There, with her arm around his shoulder, she heard his story and learned his new disgrace. Her heart froze as he announced his determination to go away, but it was not like Patience to plead. It was not her way to be the arbiter of any one's destiny, not even her son's. But her voice came in halting whispers when she spoke.

"If you could—find—it possible to—stay, not to go, Jimmie, I'd be overjoyed."

But Jim shook his head.

"I can't, mother, I've forfeited father's respect, and the men look at me as if I were unclean, an object of loathing." He caught his breath. "But don't worry, I have a good trade, I'm a good machinist and I'll get work in the city and write you every week."

And with that Patience had to be content. She returned to her seat at the table, but when Jim came down with his suitcase, the food on her plate was still untouched.

"Good-by, the best little mother a fellow ever had," he bent and kissed her, then turning with burning face, he half extended his hand toward the grim-faced man who never raised his eyes from his food.

Patience, holding tight to her boy's arm, walked with him to the door, and there followed the custom of mothers the world over as she dropped her small hoard of nickels, dimes and dollars into the coat pocket of her "laddie."

She watched him till she could no longer see for the tears in her eyes, then she stopped waving and turned back into the room, now so terribly gloomy.

"James Graham," she said, and her voice was barely a whisper as she bent toward him, her weight resting on her doubled fists on the table, "You have sent my youngest born from me." She paused while she regained control of her voice. "Then hear me—for twenty-five years I've stood beside you and worked when you did, and many times when you rested. I've brought your children into the world, and I've watched beside their sick beds for nights and days while you slept, and when they returned to the Giver, I took my place still at your side, still helping mylittle best.

"I've worked in heat and cold, and saved and scrimped and managed until you now have a fine home. I've done all the housework and never had help—I've worn clothes such as a kitchen girl would scorn—and you have never heard me give it voice before. But hear me now—until my son returns to me—my last-born laddie, I'll never more be wife of yours.

"And further, James Graham, you will not prosper. God will lay His hand upon that hard heart of yours and it will wither

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in your breast. You will want to die, but will be unable to. You have scoffed at the boy, you have sneered at him, treated him as you would not treat a dog, and all because he is of too gentle blood to fight your nasty fisticuffs.

"If there be blame for that, it should be visited on me and my father before me, who was a Quaker and ever a man of peace. That laddie o' mine never knew cowardly fear. I say it and I know my boy. He is a *gentle* man, and his heart is tender, and I say again, until he returns to me, I'll never more call you husband."

Swaying like a flower that has been crushed by a blast, Patience turned and went slowly from the room.

From that day she seemed to lose stamina. For weeks she was confined to her room and it seemed that it needed but a breath to blow her into eternity, but she fought with the great heart of the gentle and won her battle after a fashion, and one by one she resumed her duties. Her husband haunted her presence, but to him her voice and manner were gently aloof, and a great change came over the man.

He no longer walked the streets like a conquering giant of old. His step grew less buoyant, his eye less eagle-like and his shoulders stooped ever so slightly. But a trace of his masterful, dominant spirit remained, for when Patience removed her belongings to her son's room and occupied it, he made no demur, but when she sought to sit in it for hours alone, he quickly and successfully interposed.

JIM had no difficulty in finding work in the city, and being a thoroughly likeable fellow, was soon on terms of good-fellowship with his shopmates. He was friendly with all, but it was one day when he had occasion to go to the foundry on the floor above the one on which he worked, that he saw the youth who was to be his closest male friend.

Jim had secured the piece he wanted and was standing in the doorway watching the men at work. With keen interest he watched the men at their various tasks, all stripped to the waist, some large, some small, but all powerful. Suddenly his eye lighted with keen appreciation, for a newcomer passed him, stripped to the waist like his mates, but differing from them in every other respect.

"Lord, what a man!" Jim thought, as the youth in all the glory of his six-foot-two of tree-like straightness, moved this way and that, the muscles playing like silken bands under the firm, smooth skin of chest and arms. "I'll bet he's strong as an ox," he thought, "and yet he's not built a bit like father. Father's muscles group into knots and bands at the slightest tensing of an arm—This fellow's!"

Jim watched admiringly, and moved away only when the young man was called to some task that took him out of range of vision.

"I wonder how long he'd last with father?" he mused, as he returned to his work.

The noonings, after the lunches were quickly disposed of, were spent in reading, talking, smoking and "stunts." Jim was always a quiet if interested spectator at the last named, but this day he drew near to the group who were watching a youth work off his surplus energy, but even as he joined them, they broke up into little welcoming units as the cry went up—

"Shack came back this morning, and here he comes!"

And when Jim could get sight of the newcomer for the hand pumping, talking, jostling crowd around him, he saw it was the object of his admiration.

"Watch this fellow," some one said to Jim. "He's the guy that took the 'stal' out of stalwart. That fellow can lift a ton and there ain't a feat of strength that he can't go there and back on."

"Go on, Scotty," some one yelled, "start something."

And Scotty, nothing loath, dropped a match on the floor, rested on his right hand, with the outside of his right foot only touching the floor, the left foot resting on the right, his left arm doubled back of him, lowered himself very slowly toward the floor, picked up the match with his teeth and jumped nimbly erect, his face a very tasty tomato color.

A big fellow with a skin any girl would envy, placed a box under the middle of his back, bent his head backward, arms folded across his chest and picked up a handkerchief with his teeth.

"Now, Shack," they urged, and the newcomer, a youth just turned twenty, gave a short laugh and stooping picked up a cold rolled steel casting that would easily

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have taxed the strength of three men—and carried it the length of the shop, about three-quarters of a block.

"Holy smoke!"

Jim's breath exploded through his tight closed lips. Shack's eyes met his and the admiration in the younger man's drew and held the elder's attention. They exchanged smiles as the work whistle called them back to their machines.

Later that day Shack came through Jim's room and stopped at his planer.

"Where do you do gymnasium work?" he asked.

"Never did any."

"What—with that physique!"

Jim went red at the praise.

"It don't amount to anything—I'm just big," he exclaimed. "I take after my father for size, but not for strength. He's a man like you." And then he told some of the stories of his father's feats, winding up with the Atlantic City episode.

"Man alive!" Shack whistled. "Lifting a full-grown man through a crowd by the shoulders. Bee-lieve me—that's some stunt! I'm going to practise that."

At noon the next day somebody suggested that Jim and Shack spar, and Jim would have refused but that Shack was so insistent he could not. Of course he was as awkward as a cub, but the friendship in the blue eyes of Shack broke down his diffidence, and before he realized it he was side-stepping and stopping blows alternately—blows that spun him 'round and almost jolted his head off his shoulders.

"I'm not going to spare you," Shack laughed. "You've got to learn to take punishment."

When the bout was over he changed his advice slightly, it now was:

"What you've got to learn is how to *give*, not take punishment. Don't be afraid to strike, man!"

But Jim only shook his head.

The days that followed were happy ones for Jim, he had found good clean companionship and there was scarcely a night that he and Shack did not spend some hours at the gym. Shack was a born athlete and worked and played at it consistently. He took real pride in the way Jim developed from a cumbersome cub to confident, tiger-like swiftness and lion-like strength.

While Jim was always willing to put on the gloves for a friendly bout, he liked fighting not a whit more than he did when he left home. Many were the occasions when he might have indulged in a little rough and tumble fighting to the betterment of some of the "Smart Alecks" in the shop—and there are always a number of these in any place where men are who work with their hands.

"Man alive!" Shack said one day, "if you'd only put some will in it, you'd be the best man of your century."

The light in Jim's eye told how pleased he was, but he shook his head.

"You mean after you," he said.

Shack looked at him queerly.

"If you had a fighter's heart, I'd not last long with you."

THEN came a day when Shack looked on his friend with real disgust in his eyes. There had been a number of fool stunts pulled off by the practical joker which for some unknown reason cumbers the earth, and while no one minded a harmless joke even if on oneself, it had grown a little too strong, especially when shoes were hidden and the victim had to go home through the city streets and on the cars with odd shoes or dilapidated ones—or, when hats were hidden so that one had to wear a greasy skull-cap or go home bareheaded.

More than one thought the time had arrived when this person should be taught the error of his ways. There was no secret as to the guilty one, and all knew it was one of the roustabouts or heavy men, of whom there were half a dozen and who are used to lift the immense pieces of steel or iron to the machine for the mechanic to bore or plane, or whatever the job might be.

In some queer way, as such things do happen, it soon became known that in spite of Jim's great size and strength he would not fight. This was mutton for the joker and he thought it the acme of fun to play his pranks on Jim. It was when Shack came to his friend after a week of such actions that he showed the disgust he felt.

"Why don't you sail in and dust that freshie off?" he exploded. "Show him he's got a kink in his thinkery. Let it trickle in that he can't nail your hat and shoes to the floor, and your coat to the wall and hope to remain all together. Slam him so hard that he'll stop, look and listen before he bothers you again."

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Jim was sitting, it was noon time, and he placed a hand either side of Shack's waist, rose, held his friend high and then dropped him lightly to his feet.

"Aw—he's only fooling. I know it ain't much fun, but I just can't get mad. I——"

Shack's right name was Shaughnessy, and you can imagine how he hated a fight for any reason, and how it would hurt him to think of one in the present circumstances.

"And you buy a new hat, coat and shoes?" he snarled.

"I guess so." Jim turned away.

"You're the limit!" Shack spat out.

The next day the roustabouts, and among them the practical joker, who was nicknamed "Murphy," and could prove by his nose that his right name wasn't a bit like that, were putting a lathe bed on Jim's planer. It was an immense thing and was a big lift for even the three men. They had placed one end on the machine and were working it 'round straight, when Murphy stumbled and fell directly under it. His letting go threw the other men off their balance, and slewed the lathe bed so that it held by the merest edge on the machine.

The two men, with great drops of sweat standing on their brows, fought madly to hold the piece in place, to keep it from sliding till the man beneath could get clear, but the slippery metal on slippery metal with the weight back of it, was too much for their frantic efforts, and it moved ever more surely to the floor—and the man at their feet had neither time nor room in which to get clear.

It happened while one could take a long breath, and while the men were sobbing the curses back in their throats, Jim, who had been absent from his machine for an instant, returned.

In a glance he took in the situation—in a flash, acted.

With a dive he was under the great mass, caught it on his wide shoulders as it made its final plunge, braced his legs wide apart, caught at the machine with one hand and a nearby iron post with the other—and held for what seemed like an eternity, but was in reality but a minute.

Willing hands—dozens of them—caught hold and eased the mass of metal into place. Jim straightened up slowly, winced, caught sight of the man prostrate at his feet, saw that he had fainted and then walked quietly to the ice-cooler, got a dipper of water and poured it on the face of his once tormentor.

News of that nature is wafted on the air, and it seemed but a breath of time had elapsed when Jim was surrounded by men from every department. Shack pushed his way through the bunch.

"Man alive!" he bellowed—he was frantically shaking Jim's head between his hands and bawling in his face. "It was grand—you darned old galoot—you might have been killed. You saved the lives of three men, do you know it? Just another inch, and good night shirt; I'll wait in the wash for you! God-al-mighty—it was great! I wish I'd done it!" Suddenly he let go Jim's face. "Hurt?" he queried.

"Not a bit. Just skinned my shoulders a bit. I wish you'd all go away, there's nothing to make a fuss about."

Shack fizzed like a soda siphon.

"Thinks his shoulders are skinned a little—and he caught a ton of iron on the slide. You wouldn't have a —— bit of hide left if that thing had got another second's start. Talk about Samson."

Jim smiled wearily, looked into the ring of admiring, grimed faces.

"It has been a long time," he said simply, "and my little mother is a frail dove of a woman—she wants to see me bad, and I'm going home tomorrow."

He was silent for a space as was the group around him, then—

"But my father is not a frail thing—he stands six-feet-three and can lick his weight in wildcats."

"You're pretty proud of that dad of yours, ain't you?" Shack wanted to know.

"You bet your socks I am!"

"You're a queer bunch," said Shack.

JIM'S heart quickened. He once more trod the home street with its pretty cottages, white with green blinds, and while yet afar off, he espied his mother seated in her little old hickory rocker on the little grass-plot before the house.

Is there born a man who does not thrill at the sight of a silvery-haired mother awaiting him?

She was dressed in her dearly loved soft gray, a spotless kerchief crossed her slender breast and met at her tiny waist. She

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was day-dreaming and sat with closed eyes, and so Jim was beside her and she did not know it.

"Mother," he spoke softly, so as not to affright her.

Her eyes opened slowly as if the voice was but part of a day-dream she'd often had, gazed up at the tall form beside her, took in the handsome, satisfying, eye-filling grandeur of his young manhood and her face became transfigured.

Putting out a hand she got unsteadily to her feet.

"Methinks, laddie o' mine, you had better steady your mother with your arms a bit, the warm September sun does sadly affect thy mother betimes."

But Jim had both arms around her before she was well started, and with the strength of his young arms softened to velvet bands, he held her close while she patted his broad shoulders and back as of old.

When he had fed and washed and she had heard all his news, she rose.

"Your father is at the fair. There is some aspirant to fisticuffs who plans to carry off the honors of the county, and your father will not allow that."

Jim's face clouded at the memories recalled, and his mother, reading his thoughts, spoke quickly.

"Come, I'll fetch my bonnet and we'll go to the fair also." She lifted her small head proudly. "I want all our neighbors to know that my son has returned and there will be no better opportunity. I will show Mistress Mahlon if my son does not think much of his mother or he would not have gone away."

With daintily-glowing cheeks, head high, strutting like a warring bantam, Patience piloted her big son through the crowd of strangers at the fair gates and on to the booths and stalls where her neighbors were displaying their jells, cakes, bread and patchwork quilts.

Mrs. Mahlon's small eyes took on a glint when she saw mother and son approaching, and she made her waddly way toward them.

"You look pounds stronger and finer since your son's return, Patience Graham," she beamed.

Patience drew closer to Jim and rested her cheek on a spot midway between his elbow and shoulder, so she stood while they came,—the townfolk, men, women and children to give welcome to the son of Patience Graham.

"He's as big as his father," one said. "You should be proud of your son, Patience. Few boys go to the city and come back to the old folk——"

"I am proud. I had no doubt that he would return," Patience boasted gently. "But we must find his father. Have you seen James, Abner?"

"I reckon he's at the ring where they're going to pull off the big fight," the man addressed replied. "I wanta be there when Bull punches the everlastin' daylights outa that city fellow—and that's where I'm goin' now. Come along, Jim—" the man's mouth flew open as he remembered—"or maybe you don't want to go."

Jim's face went red, but before he could speak his mother replied for him:

"Indeed he does. Go, you, Jim, and come back and tell me how your father deports himself. I am ever a woman of peace and hold not with fighting ways, but it is seemly that a man have strength and the ability to use it, and I'm proud that my James is using his in so good a cause. My laddie takes after my father, who was ever a man of peace, but a fearsome one when aroused."

The men smiled in sickening silence and coughed back of their hands.

"Big enough to shove a freight car and he ain't got the guts of a rabbit!"

Jim watched the fight from a spot outside the laughing, excited crowd. No one seemed to want to watch beside him, but he hardly noticed it for his entire attention was on the two battling figures, veritable giants and evenly matched in all but age, the stranger being the younger by about fifteen years. Jim's heart glowed at the clever maneuvering, which his own training enabled him to understand; watched with indrawn breath when the younger man seemed to be winning, and exulted in his heart when his father gained the mastery.

But there came a time when it seemed that the older man must be worn down and battered to the earth, but he always came back just in time.

"Game as a tiger," some one shouted.

Jim saw his father gather himself as if for a spring, and something happened so quickly the eye could not follow it, but Jim saw his father's body hurl forward. Jim

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swallowed something he hadn't known was in his throat, he saw his father carried off on the shoulders of the crowd.

It was then he became aware of the group of men huddled in the shadow just back of him—or rather became conscious of the fact that he had seen and heard them all through the fight. Something about their skulking shapes as they made off into the darkness of the trees and bushes opened a door of his subconscious mind. What was it he had heard them mutter? It came in a flash.

"If the old 'un puts it over, we'll make mincemeat of him," he had heard. And then—"Now, mind, wait till I start—" This last when they were moving off.

He smiled after their retreating backs. Small chance they had to put their threats into effect, for he realized now they were directed against his father in case he should win from the stranger—and then his eyes followed the cheering mob that carried his father victoriously aloft.

JIM sat with his mother under the trees away from the crowd and lights. When his father had dressed and gone to greet his wife, Jim had slipped away, unable yet to face him, and now he was back again. Night had slipped over the edge of dusk, and they sat silent, each enjoying the other's presence. Patience joying in her laddie's nearness, Jim wondering how he was going to face his father.

There was a rustling in the bushes back of them. Jim came erect at the first sound. Then came a low hiss and whispered words. Jim heard, but a quick glance at his mother showed she had not. His heart turned to ice as he caught their purport. It was the same crowd he had seen outside the group at the ring.

Five shadows sneaked out of the deeper shadows of the trees into the lighter shadows of the open spaces and Jim saw four of the most villainous looking faces he'd ever seen, the fifth was the man his father had bested. A man crossed from the lights of the main thoroughfare of the grounds and struck across the open space toward where Patience and Jim were sitting.

"There comes your father," Patience said. "I could tell his walk in a million."

Midway across the wide open ground, the five who had skulked in the shadows leaped toward Bull Graham. Jim tried to call a warning, but his tongue froze in his mouth. His father's figure disappeared in a whirling mass.

Something died that instant in Jim Graham—and at the same instant something was born. He hurled his young body through space.

Frantically he rubbed his eyes, but the redness welled up in a great blur. He felt unaccountably like shrieking, like singing, like cursing and praying. He wanted to do all, but he did none. The red settled to a glowing ruby light and his body took on the lightness of thistledown.

He struck at the nearest man, a clean straight blow, driven by his great body, and when it found its mark it sounded like a booted man kicking a wet plank. The man's arms waved around his head like a tight-rope walker preserving his balance, then he settled in a quiet heap, teeth falling gently around him.

Jim wasted no time on him, there were other things to do—and he wanted to do them. For the first time in his life he wanted to fight, he liked the sound, the thought, the feel of it. He thought he was bellowing like a mad bull, but he was as silent as the tomb really; he dived to where several men were bending over a heap on the ground that seemed, despite their numbers, to be giving them some trouble.

Again Jim caught the nearest man a blow on the side of the head, and that man heard chimes in that ear for a month, and nothing else ever afterward. The others turned with one accord to Jim, but he was like Hades gone mad—fighting for the sheer love of it.

Once they bore him down by weight of numbers, but nothing could hold him, his huge body doubled like a jackknife and straightened out, flashed at them and two men fell. Another pressed him close, but Jim held him tight to his breast until he hung limp, and then he dropped him like a useless cloth. The next man who faced him Jim dropped with a blow that was like an overdose of soothing syrup to a month-old baby.

And now, his breathing bursting through his lips like that of an engine exhaust, he looked about, but had no time to take in the scenery, for the men who had been felled first were slowly staggering to their feet. They gathered strength and two of

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them rushed him, while a third circled 'round—a knife in his hand.

He found himself wondering if his father was dead, he lay so quiet, and for one almost fatal second pondered going to see. It was then his mother's voice came to him:

"Fight, laddie, fight, and stop not. Fight, stop them—you can do it, son. Smite them, son, as thy grandfather sent the hell-hounds back to the devil, their master, so send you these back. Aw—Jimmie—laddie——"

Her voice ended in a shriek, for she saw that while Jim grappled with the two the third was upon him with uplifted knife.

In a twinkling something happened. Bull Graham had sprung from the ground, his great foot shot out and the man with the knife was lying several feet away with fishy looking eyes. Then he lifted one of the remaining two in his arms and flung him quite a bit to one side.

And now Jim, unhampered by numbers, laughed a deep laugh in his throat, put a large hand each side of the last man's waist and flung him among his friends.

People came running, torches were brought, and one and all crowded around Jim, for from almost the beginning of the fight there had been a circle of onlookers, but Jim had eyes for none but his father, and a great flame leaped in his eyes as he saw Bull push aside the admiring groups, stoop so as to get the light of the torches out of his eyes and lunge toward him.

"That is my son, Jim," he thundered for all the world to hear. "No other man in the world could fight like that—it's the Quaker blood in him!"

The hands of father and son met in a finger-crushing clasp, and each laughed in his throat—a laugh good to hear.

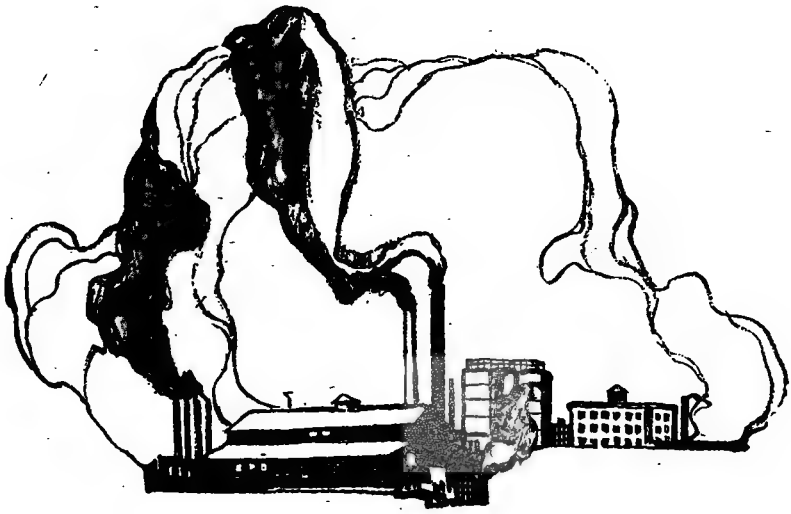
Nobody had noticed when the thugs escaped into oblivion, but everybody saw the prideful strut of Patience Graham as she pranced along between mighty husband and mightier son.

A neighbor spoke—

"You oughta be proud of that son of yours, Patience, I didn't think he had it in him."

Patience tossed her head, her heart leaping against her frail bosom.

"Didn't you?" she scoffed gently, "I did. *I know my son!*"



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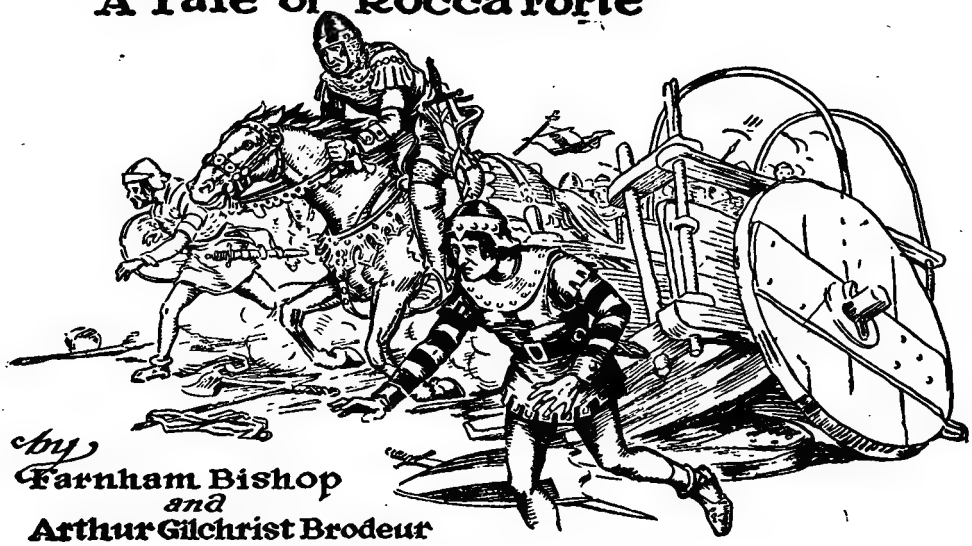
The Pass of Blood

A Tale of Rocca Forte



by
Farnham Bishop
and
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "The Quest of Gaimar the Grim," "The Red Witch," etc.

AS THE king entered, the low, excited buzz of conversation ceased. Glancing from face to face, Roger of Sicily read in the faces of his counselors the knowledge of what had happened. Evil news travels fast.

"Be seated," the king commanded. "Ali Hassan, read the letter."

A lean, bearded Moslem, in the white burnoose of his people, drew from his sleeve a roll of parchment, and read aloud:

"To Roger, King of the Two Sicilies, from his servant, Fulvia of Rocca Forte, Greeting:

"This day, the tenth of November, 1148, my father, Arnulfo, Count of Rocca Forte, has been laid to rest. He was most foully murdered by the notorious outlaws Odo and Sigismundo, who have been duly hanged for their bloody deed. I, Fulvia, do most earnestly pray my lord the king to bestow on me the lands and title of my father, and do swear to hold them in lasting loyalty to his Majesty.

"Given at Rocca Forte, by the hands of Ibn Hawwas, physician and scribe."

The king's face expressed the liveliness of his emotions. Although he had read the letter already, he could not easily overcome his grief and anger.

"I wish the girl had seen fit to send the murderers to me," he muttered, "for my torturers to deal with."

Roger of Sicily was a tall, powerful man of five and fifty, bearded like a Mohammedan, with strong, leonine features. Consummate and wily diplomat though he was, there was nothing cunning or tricky in the expression of eyes or face. They, like his splendid body, were under perfect control: he seemed apart from the world, wrapped in his own thoughts, a scholar rather than a ruler of men. Yet he was both, and soldier too.

"What think you of the Lady Fulvia's petition, seigniors?" he asked.

Ali Hassan, closer to the king's confidence than any other man, except George of Antioch, the absent admiral, spoke out at once, as if certain of his ground.

"It were well to grant it, your Majesty," he said bluntly. "The Lady Fulvia has already proved her ability to hold her castle and land against strong, unscrupulous enemies. It is common knowledge how she led her men-at-arms to victory over the turbulent Gaimar, how she tricked and conquered Fulk the Black and Ricoberto, who aspired to her hand; now, it seems, she has captured and executed her father's murderers. Moreover, Ibn Hawwas, whom I know for a pious and faithful man, writes me that her subjects, Moslem and Christian alike, love and honor her. I counsel that she be invested with the title of Countess of Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli."

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King Roger turned on his too confident adviser, his eyes sparkling with anger.

"By the glory of God, Hassan!" he exclaimed harshly, "you take too much on yourself! I asked you for an opinion, not for orders!"

Hassan bit his lip, and bowed to the ground. The Norman nobles clustered about the king's seat scowled at the Mohammedan, as much to flatter Roger as to express their own displeasure with his words.

"Let the king speak his will," suggested Christodoulos, a supple Byzantine renegade from two religions. "We do not presume to advise against his Majesty's wishes."

Roger smiled upon him. Imperious, self-willed despot that he was, the King of Sicily's headstrong will often overmastered his wisdom.

"If the times were peaceful," he explained, "I should hold it both just and prudent to confirm Arnulfo's daughter in her father's titles. But you know how turbulent our world is. George of Antioch, leaving our Berber subjects on the African coast but half-subdued, has been obliged to set sail with most of our galleys for Constantinople, to put down the arrogance of our arch-enemy, the Greek emperor.

"He has sacked Corinth, and when last heard of, his landing-parties were engaged in bitter conflict with Thebes. The Greeks are too numerous and too cunning for us, unless we can devote all our energies to them. If the Berbers should take this time for another revolt, there would be nothing to hold off their swift galleys, which would ravage all our coasts. Some of our own Normans, too, have rebelled against us, and made common cause with the Berbers.

"Rocca Forte lies but sixty miles from Palermo. Its harbor is small but secure; its castle dominates the countryside. By sea and land it offers a sure approach to the heart of Sicily. If it should fall into the hands of the corsairs, they could threaten us from both sides. Their fleets could venture to the Golden Shell itself; their horsemen could pour down through the Pass of Blood to the very gates of this city of Palermo, and thunder at our palace-door with their spears.

"In this emergency, wisdom demands that Rocca Forte be held by a man, who can command the respect of his vassals, and lead them to war. This girl is as brave as her father; but she can not ride down strong men with the spear, or risk her soft body in the crush of battle. We must find her a husband, who can protect both her and her land. Rocca Forte is too vital a point in our defenses to risk in a woman's care."

The king's eyes roved about the splendid room, with its graceful Greek columns, its pointed Saracen arches, its lovely arabesques, and cunning mosaics wrought with jewel-like stones fitted together by the hands of artists of three races. Pausing at maps and charts hung on the painted walls, the manuscripts bound in cloth of gold and piled in racks of grotesquely carved wood, his gaze at last rested on the glorious city below and beyond the Moorish window. Straight down to the water it ran: a city of limestone and marble, of cathedrals and mosques, palaces and temples, embraced between two turquoise arms of the Mediterranean.

"Palermo," he said gravely, "is the jewel of Sicily; and Rocca Forte is the key to its casket."

The Normans about him chorused their assent, and even Ali Hassan seemed convinced.

"It is true," confessed the Moslem. "And though Fulvia's people love her well, it is doubtful whether my rough countrymen in the hills would follow a woman."

"They would not," the king insisted. "You know, Hassan, that your religion holds a woman as the man's plaything. If the Berbers come, raising the cry of 'Sicily for Islam,' all but the most faithful of our many thousand Moslems would join them rather than fight for a king whose officers are women.

"To make matters worse, the Pope has proclaimed a crusade against the Mohammedans of Palestine, who are endangering the very existence of the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem. Our Saracen subjects are grievously angered; the ancient enmity between Moslem and Christian may break out again on the slightest pretext, and turn Sicily into two armed camps. Fulvia—a mere girl, for all her wisdom—could never hold her own in an uprising. She must marry, and the sooner the better."

A finely proportioned, muscular man in soiled leather stepped forward, and bent one knee before the king.

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"My good lord," he entreated, "remember the wounds and the labors I have willingly suffered in your wars! When I took Capua for you, you promised that I should have the next good fief that fell vacant. My castle of Corleone lies almost half-way between here and Rocca Forte, the possession of which would make me doubly able to stand off your enemies from the capital. Give me the key of the casket to hold. I will guard it well; and I will be a kind and faithful husband to the Lady Fulvia."

"Rise, Hugo," said Roger, with the utmost graciousness. "Your request is granted. I will send letters to the lady this night, informing her that I have contracted her to you in marriage, and commanding her to prepare for your coming. You would best get the wedding over with as soon as you can."

As he turned away, Hugo of Corleone caught the envious sneer in the eyes of Christodoulos, and laid a heavy hand on the renegade's shoulder.

"Look you, turncoat," he said fiercely, "I am a man of few words and hard blows. If you think, because my hair is a trifle gray where the helmet binds, and my years are five and forty, that I am too old to resent insolence, you may learn that men do not call me 'Hugo the Hammer' for nothing. A hammer I am, and my strokes are hard."

The king interfered before Christodoulos could answer.

"There is no need for hard words, seigniors," he said. "Let no man dare to oppose any gift of mine; and let none presume to quarrel in my court. The council is dismissed. You, Hassan, will attend me at midnight to show me your calculations of the eclipse."

FULVIA, by the death of her father, mistress of town, castle, and harbor of Rocca Forte, sovereign lady of Castrocavalli, sat in the high tower-room of her stronghold, overlooking the sea. Her bold blue eyes and magnificent tawny-gold hair were the heritage of her father's Viking ancestors; her Roman mother's pride of blood and slender, stately beauty was transmuted, in the daughter, into glowing loveliness. A page in sky-blue silk stood at her elbow.

With an impatient sweep of her rounded arm, Fulvia flung to the floor a manuscript she had been vainly trying to read.

"I have not learned my lessons well," she laughed. "Fetch Ibn Hawwas, boy, and Jaufré too. I can see by the seal it is something from the king."

In a few minutes the men entered the room. Hawwas, a black-eyed, hawk-faced little Arab in the sixties, had been the faithful physician and counselor of Arnulfo, Fulvia's father; Jaufré, big, broad-faced, fierce-eyed, and warm of heart, was the captain of her Norman men-at-arms.

"What does this say?" Fulvia challenged, stooping to toss the manuscript to Hawwas. "You have done your best to teach me to read, but these clerkly scrawls are too much for my ignorance."

His face inscrutable, Ibn Hawwas read the king's letter aloud. Fulvia listened, tapping her white teeth with an ivory bodkin, while the rich color rose to her dark cheeks. At last she sprang to her feet, paced up and down the chamber twice, and turned to confront the two.

"Does this king think," she cried—"this king, who sits in idleness at Palermo among his philosophers and his slave-women—that he can dispose of me as he would one of the Greek girls in his harem? Does he dream Arnulfo's daughter will take a husband at command? So this Hugo will come in a fortnight to take me, will he? He will find me ready!"

"This is treason, my lady," the little Arab warned her.

Fulvia became calmer instantly.

"Why, so it is," she laughed, "and treason does not become one of my race. Well, then, I will obey the king's command to marry—when and whom I please. Hugo is no king, however, and I will resist him as well as I may. What sort of man is this Hugo, Jaufré?"

The soldier, visibly embarrassed, looked obstinately at his feet, as if seeking information from them.

"Why look you, Lady Countess," he said slowly, "he is much the sort of man your father was, though not so old. Indeed, Count Arnulfo and he were comrades together in the king's Italian wars. He is a big man, Hugo, stern and strong, but God-fearing as he is just. He has too many men for us to resist, and he is no fool, either. Fifty lances and nigh five hundred foot follow his banner.

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"Strong as he is in the field, he excels in siege-craft, in which no man is his equal. Give him a month, and he would reduce this castle of yours as surely as I could pull down a thatched hut. He understands and uses every engine known to the art of war; not even the Byzantines are his masters, for he has many of them in his host. I have known the very sight of his standard in the besiegers' camp to terrify the garrison into surrender before his machines could cast a stone. King Roger loves him, for his skill and his siege-train are as useful to his Majesty as a sword to me, or a net is to a fisherman.

"Nor is Seignior Hugo a mere mechanic. When the wall is breached, he himself leads his picked stormers to the assault. Few dare to stand in their way. I see no help for you, my lady; if Hugo says 'Come,' you had best come before he fetches you. Neither moat nor walls will keep him out."

Fulvia's head wrinkled in thought, but her eyes gleamed.

"How many men can you muster, all told?" she asked.

Jaufré considered.

"Sixty good Normans here," he announced at last; "thirty more under young Gui, the Frenchman, at Castrocavalli, perhaps four score of your father's old soldiers, of many bloods, and indifferently armed, could be got together in the town. They have not been called out for five years, you will remember. Then you have seven war-galleys, manned by Saracen sailors from the fisherman's town across the harbor; they are loyal to the death, excellent at close quarters, and skilful seamen. There may be three hundred of them."

"Why, then, we have enough to meet Seignior Hugo in fair field!" Fulvia rejoiced.

"Not so," Ibn Hawwas broke in. "The fishermen of my religion who man your galleys are good fighters, it is true; but they are captained by Normans. If you take them off their ships, and lead them yourself—as I know you would insist on doing—they would not follow you. You are a woman, and Islam knows not women as leaders of men. In time you may win them, if this fool's talk of a crusade passes over. They will not stir a hand to help a Christian woman while your priests preach war against their faith. You must win them slowly; they will be of no help now."

This was crushing news. Fulvia had counted on those Moslem fishermen, who had always been true to her father.

"Your father was a man, not a girl," Hawwas said, reading her thoughts.

"It is plain I can not meet this Hugo in the field, then," Fulvia admitted, "and that Rocca Forte, strong as it is, can not hold out against such a master of siege-craft. But there is one thing I know better than he: the country about here and Castrocavalli.

"Get together provisions for seventy men, Jaufré, for three weeks' campaign. Recruit all the men you can in the town and villages. Detail a score of the older men-at-arms to hold Rocca Forte, and prepare to lead the rest to Castrocavalli in three days' time. Hawwas, fetch ink and parchment."

PURPLE withe motion, Hugo of Corleone read Fulvia's answer for the seventh time.

"Body of Barabbas!" he gasped. "Was there ever such a woman!" And to his grinning captain of horse he summarized:

"She will choose her own husband, and she does not choose me! There is insolence for you! A woman to choose her own husband! She bids me come with all my engines at my back, and promises to take me and all my men prisoner, without a drop of blood shed on either side! As if the woman—or man, for that matter—breathed who could take me prisoner without shedding blood enough to drown a dozen villages!

"Get all things in order, knave! Every day that stands between me and this hot-blooded Amazon is a year added to my purgatory!"

That night, however, Hugo started out of a sound sleep, leaped from his bed, and sent in haste for his trusty herald.

"Ride for Palermo as if the fiends were after you!" he urged. "Pray his Majesty the king to send me, from the record of his fiefs, a careful plan of Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli. And before you go, rout out those spies I brought with me from the king, and bid them set out for Rocca Forte tonight. They must neither tarry nor sleep till they have found out what preparations the Lady Fulvia has made. Now speed!"

Sure as he was of his own skill and the superior force of his following, Hugo had

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not been quite at ease since reading Fulvia's defiance. Her letter alone was proof that she would resist; and he remembered well the tales of her former exploits. What troubled him most was that all her victories had been won over superior numbers.

The fiercest, most desperate men in all the two Sicilies had fallen before her keen intelligence; force of arms had never availed against her cunning. Fulk the Black; Ricoberto the Sly; Alberic, the Lombard butcher; Gaimar, with his hundred fighting Normans; and, last of all, Odo and Sigismundo, the gigantic outlaws; all had used their utmost strength and wit against her, in their efforts to win her wide lands and her matchless beauty; and all had died in the attempt.

"At least," he chuckled sardonically, "she will not kill me, for she has sworn to take me prisoner without shedding blood."

Yet he could not rid himself of the uneasy feeling that she had some startling surprise in store for him. She was so fiendishly successful! Hugo was no hothead; he had learned never to underrate an adversary, and he would not do so now, even if the adversary was a woman.

Four days later his spies returned with the news that Fulvia had led out the whole host of Rocca Forte, excepting a mere handful to hold the castle; had conscripted every fighting man from the Christian quarter of the town, and had sent the whole force, seventy-five men in all, to Castrocavalli, two days' march to the west of Rocca Forte. Here, she had stripped the castle of all its garrison, some thirty men, and had gone on with more than a hundred men-at-arms, and all the male peasants of the countryside, to the mountains west of Castrocavalli. This mountain-wall was her land-frontier: steep, rugged, poorly watered, it was impassable for an army, except at one place—the Pass of Blood.

The Pass of Blood was well named. The road from Palermo, beyond Corleone, entered a deep, precipitous gorge, dark even at midday, and wound up through its cavernous jaws. Climbing to the lowest point of the divide, the road surmounted the crest, and descended by another gorge into Castrocavalli. Army after army, throughout the centuries of Sicilian strife, had held the crest of the divide against invaders: Siculians, Sicinians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, and Normans. Here had been fought desperate battles for the rich fields of the island; here had been decided the fates of peoples. Its grassy floor was enriched with the bones of thousands slain in a hundred wars.

Hugo clapped his hands in satisfaction.

"So she is resolved to stand and fight it out!" he exclaimed. "Has she fortified the pass?"

"She has set her whole host to building a mighty wall across it," the chief of the spies answered.

"Good. Then I will hammer my way through!"

And Hugo bent over the map which the king had sent him. His stubby forefinger, running down the parchment, stopped at the Pass of Blood.

EAGER as he was to meet and vanquish the woman destined to be the prize of his valor, Hugo showed his generalship and his respect for her intelligence by taking no chances. The thirty-mile march was accomplished with every precaution, as if every wayside wood, every tree-clad hill, might conceal a host of enemies. Ten mounted men-at-arms, in open order, rode well in advance of the column; behind their screen marched a strong advance-guard of veteran pikemen, followed by the main body of the infantry. Then came the supply-train, flanked by the rest of the infantrymen.

The engineers and sappers themselves furnished the escort for the siege-engines: great shapeless masses beneath their protective coverings of hides. The remaining horsemen brought up the rear. A surprise attack was completely provided against; for a long siege the army was well prepared.

Forced to keep pace with the plodding ox-teams, they required nearly three days to reach their objective. On the morning of the third day, rounding a curve of the broad Palermo road, the mounted scouts came full upon the entrance to the pass: a rising, narrow valley walled with low, precipitous limestone cliffs. Its slope was gradual; but the frowning walls on either hand leaped one above the other, like a giant staircase, till, in the distance, they reached a height which shut out the blue sky altogether.

These tumbling masses of rock, jumbled together as if thrown by playful titans, overhung the valley beneath at an angle

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that plainly forbade ascent; the only way to Castrocavalli and Rocca Forte lay through the pass; the war-horse did not live, nor the armored man, that could hope to scale its sides. To make the prospect worse, the pass was not straight, but wound serpent-like toward a distant notch in the mountains to the northeast. It was an easy place to hold; an almost impossible stronghold to take. One of the horsemen rode back to the main force, and reported these things to Hugo.

At once Hugo sent word back to the main body of his cavalry, who guarded the rear, to move up and form the advance guard. When this had been done, the entire host slowly entered the pass; ten mounted men deployed ahead as before, the rest of the troop following in column of fours, at the head of the infantry and on the wide bank of the little spring-fed brook that divided the valley. Fordable though this stream was in all but a few places, Hugo judged it unwise even to place so slight a barrier between any elements of his force till he had ascertained the position of the defense.

But defense there seemed to be none. Hugo, scanning the broken skyline to right and left till his neck ached, saw not so much as the sheen of a single spear-head against the rim of the cañon; his mounted scouts, out of sight 'round the shoulder of some great cliff ahead, had not raised a cry. And now, as the floor of the valley rose more and more, making the men pant and the laden horses blow, occasional scattered boulders about the brook's bank forced the riders to divide and the ranks to break. The solid-wheeled ox-carts rumbling over the thick grass behind jolted over or around these stones, with an ominous clatter and pound of the siege-engines with which they were laden.

Hugo grunted contemptuously.

"For so terrible a woman, she seems a fool," he mused. "If she had half the eye of a soldier, she would have lined these crags with peasants, to cast down boulders on us. And yet I do not like it; there may be some deep design in what looks like transparent madness."

It was plain that his men did not like it either. Silent, watchful, suspicious, they marched doggedly on; the emptier the pass appeared, the more uneasily they scanned its lowering sides.

"At least they will hold Aghlab's Stair," Hugo thought; and almost on the heels of his thought there came a shout, the jingle of harness and the hoof-beats of a horse, as one of his scouts spurred back 'round the rocky wall ahead.

"They defend Aghlab's Stair," the scout reported, "in force. A fox could not get past them."

"We will see," Hugo answered. "Forward all!"

The ranks closed; the host pressed on at a swifter pace. Now that there was prospect of meeting the enemy face to face, their hearts were lightened, their faces eager. In twenty minutes' time they came to the stair, and saw their foes.

Aghlab's Stair was a steeply sloping cleft in the mighty cliff which formed the right wall of the gorge. Cut from the solid limestone by some ancient, long-vanished stream, it was smooth as if sculptured, and floored with a slippery carpet of slimy moss. Its name commemorated the exploit of the wild Saracen Emir who, three centuries before, had used it as a sally-port, leading his savage swordsmen silently down it one dark night to trap and cut to pieces a great host of Byzantine Christians in the pass below. By this way, and by this alone, could Hugo scale the great crags which girt the pass; if Aghlab's Stair were closed, he must lead his men to the very crest of the pass, and through the distant notch in the mountain-barrier of Castrocavalli.

But the stair was closed. At the top of the cleft, a low breastwork glittered with flashing steel, and flaunted Fulvia's banner, on which the arms of Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli were quartered. As the head of the column appeared below, the helmets of men-at-arms sprang up behind the breastwork, and a loud shout of defiance rang out. At Hugo's word, his herald rode as far up the ancient sluice as his horse could comfortably go, blew a blast on his long trumpet, in token of parley, and cried in a ringing voice:

"In the name of Hugo, Seignior of Corleone, and in the name of the king, I demand passage for the said seignior, and for all his troops. Which granted, I demand further full surrender and submission, in the king's name, and in that of the said Hugo, rightful Count of Rocca Forte, *de par le Roi.*"

A tall, sturdily built soldier, in full armor, mounted the breastwork and made reply.

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"I, Jaufré, captain of men-at-arms, refuse passage and submission in the name of Fulvia, Countess of Rocca Forte and of Castrocavalli, and do offer the said Hugo his choice of two things: let him either cast down his arms, submit himself and his claims to the Lady Fulvia, and ascend freely—or let him depart at once as he came. Failing this choice, let him fight."

Having received the answer he expected, the herald withdrew. As soon as he was safe out of harm's way, a great round boulder thundered down the cleft, bounded down upon the grass among Hugo's men—who leaped nimbly aside to let it pass—and crashed against the further cliff in a shower of rock-dust.

Hugo cast one look up the stair and at the men-at-arms lining the rampart.

"It is useless," he commented grimly. "Not three men abreast can climb that devil's slide. Two lively lads at the top could bowl an army off its feet with a crowbar and a few rocks. Gaultier, take fifty pikemen and watch the stair. Good. We will press on."

On marched the rest of the column toward the further end of the pass, the fifty riders in advance. No more foes were visible; the march was unimpeded, save by the quickening rise of the grassy floor, until they came to a level space where the rock-walls retreated on either hand, only to narrow again fifty yards further on.

As they debouched into this little plain, Hugo, riding ahead, started, turned in his saddle, and shouted to his horsemen:

"Down lances and into line! Trot!"

Before them rose a thick and threatening dust-cloud, covering the approach of many hoofs. With lowered lances the mounted men-at-arms trotted forward, waiting the word to gallop and charge. Behind them the infantry stood ready, with swords, pikes, and long hooked axes, to dash in and support the troopers.

But the attack was never made. Nearer and nearer came the swirling dust-cloud, till the sun, beating down hotly through the cliffs, shone through it and glinted on the long horns of a herd of cattle. Instantly the riders dashed in, rounded up the herd, seized the struggling, cursing man who drove them, and celebrated the capture of fresh beef with triumphant whoops.

Pinioned between two burly soldiers, the flushed and disheveled herdsman answered Hugo's questions shortly but satisfactorily. He had a farm, it seemed, a little way beyond the meadow, which was his property. Yes, he knew of Hugo's coming, but had thought he could get his cattle out of the pass before the invaders arrived. Yes, the pass was defended, by a great wall a little this side of the crest of the divide. He did not know how many the defenders might be.

"Drive the cattle ahead," Hugo commanded him; and the disappointed farmer was forced to retrace his steps, as unpaid herdsman to animals no longer his. In a little while the farm-house, a low, rambling building of timber and plaster, came into sight. It nearly filled the pass, and was stripped and deserted. Halting his men, and reconnoitering 'round it, Hugo found, back of the narrow outbuildings and pens behind it, a great pile of sawn lumber. At the sight of this, he burst out laughing.

"After all, this cunning Fulvia is only a woman!" he chuckled. "What man would have left good wood about, for me to make siege-works of?"

His curiosity satisfied, he returned to question the peasant again. The fellow had turned sullen, however; so Hugo ordered the advance, taking the farmer with them.

Rounding a huge rocky buttress, they were greeted by a sudden blowing of many trumpets, and the jeering shouts of many voices. The invaders halted, in astonishment at that which loomed before them.

IT WAS a mighty wall, nearly as high as the cliffs on either hand, and built, not in a straight line, but in a salient angle, or wedge, which blocked the pass. Its point, running out in sullen menace, was toward them; its base was of stone-work, constructed from the wreckage of ancient forts of bygone days. Above this base, the rampart was made of the green trunks of mighty trees, clearly banked up behind with earth, and, as the farmer assured his captors, with boulders. From the battlemented parapet, crowded with defenders in shining mail, banners waved, trumpets blew, the points of weapons and the blank faces of polished shields gleamed.

"Here, at least, will be sport," Hugo laughed, rubbing his hands. "But here, too, the woman's hand is plain."

The jeering defenders laughed his herald

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to scorn. Let the valiant lord of Corleone come and take his new fief, they mocked; he would find his people glad to welcome him as so great a soldier deserved.

Holding his eager warriors well out of arrow-shot—for a few badly aimed discharges warned him that to venture too near might be dangerous—Hugo scanned the wall with an expert's eye.

"No proper defense," he observed to his captain of sappers. "There are no engines to shoot stones, no hoardings to drop rocks or pour down burning pitch. There is not even a sally-port, unless you count Aghlab's Stair, which is too far back to serve them well, and is guarded by Gaultier and his fifty pikes. Have you arranged for mounted couriers to bring the alarm from him to us, in case of a sortie there?"

The officer nodded.

"No fighting wall this," he declared contemptuously. "It has neither moat nor flanking towers to hinder us."

"And look at the long point of yonder salient," continued Hugo. "It is a weakness rather than a strength. If a wall could charge, it would be deadly; but it is we who charge the wall; and that angle is easy to undermine. Bid your fellows hasten forward with that timber we found at the farm."

In an incredibly short time the well-trained veterans rushed the timber forward, measured, marked, and cut it to the length their officers indicated. Long spikes, bands and braces of iron, and bags of bolts and rivets were brought up from the wagons; and soon a gang of men were busy putting together a number of odd-looking structures.

Others, almost without an order, dug trenches and threw up ramparts just out of arrow-shot from the wall, and there set up and emplaced a formidable battery of mangonels and catapults. Camp was pitched with the ease of long-accustomed routine. Another line of earthworks, running from cliff to cliff, protected the rear of the encampment against any attack from the direction of Aghlab's Stair.

There remained the exposure to arrow-flights from the cliffs to right and left, but not a bow-string twanged from the heights; so far as could be seen, there was not so much as a single foe anywhere but in front, behind the great wall. Muttering something about "mad folly," Hugo walked briskly from one party of workmen to another, pointing out faulty work, encouraging good, and urging haste.

By the middle of the afternoon the last of the strange structures was completed. In the meantime, the captured cattle were slaughtered, skinned, and dressed. The hides, raw and bloody as they were, were instantly nailed upon the roofs of two shed-like contrivances on rollers, built as stoutly as wood and iron could be joined. Then, fires having been built and the meat roasted, the besiegers sat merrily down to their meal.

Hugo alone fasted; it was not his custom to eat until his engines were well at work. He stood, frowning and thoughtful, eying the angle of the defending wall, and weighing well his plan of offense.

When the men had eaten, the entire camp broke into feverish activity. Mantlets, or great wooden shields, big enough to hide a man's entire body, and stout enough to withstand an arrow from the strongest bow, were advanced beyond the newly constructed trench; screened by these mantlets, and by stout pavisses—movable wooden walls, or articulated groups of mantlets—a stream of sappers ran forward, dragging their spades and mattocks behind them. A thick flight of arrows poured forth from the parapet of the wall, and stuck quivering in the wooden shields; but not a man was hurt.

Safely ensconced behind the pavisses, the sappers began to drive a zig-zag sap, which grew with amazing rapidity, approaching the angle of the great wall with ruthless persistence. Arrows rained down about the diggers; stones, hurled by hand, fell short; but the wooden shelters did their work well, and the sappers laughed at the helplessness of their foes.

But presently the sap came so near the wall that a large stone, hurled by the hand of a bearded giant, shattered a plank in one of the pavisses. Hugo, blowing a blast on his trumpet, ordered a change in tactics. One of the hide-covered sheds, following the sap, rolled cumbrously forward toward the point of the salient. This shed, called a "cat" in the military parlance of the time, was floorless; within it a dozen powerful men thrust at balks of timber which ran along its front and sides, urging it forward on wooden rollers. Straight to the end of the sap it trundled, till one end bumped against the very edge of the wall.

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With wild shouts of consternation, the defenders lined the parapet, hurling down boulders as well as they could from their unskilfully constructed rampart, pouring vessels of burning oil down upon the roof of the cat. But its timbers were stout and double; double were the green hides upon its roof, so that it resisted fire and shock alike. And in the background, out of range, the second shed waited, ready to take its place, if some heavy boulder proved too much for the planking.

But there was no need. The roof held, the hides were flame-proof. Undisturbed, the sappers within the cat's belly plied their tools, digging steadily away under the foundation of the wall at that fatally vulnerable angle. It was not their purpose to tunnel through, and come out on the other side; that was unnecessary. Hugo had bidden them to make a sufficiently large cavity, or mine-chamber, under the angle, propping this up with dry timbers.

When this was done, straw and finely chopped wood would be passed along the sap, delivered to the miners, and placed by them inside the excavation. Larger billets would follow, to be heaped carefully about the roof-props.

And now, thoroughly content, Hugo sat down by one of the cooking-fires, and made his long-deferred meal. The cook laid before him a wooden platter laden with an enormous cut of roast loin. Drawing his dagger, and grasping the meat in the fingers of his left hand, Hugo set to work.

The sun was now low in the heavens. Hugo's thoughts were pleasant.

"There is plenty of water in that spring at the farm," he observed affably to the cook. "There is meat in abundance. By midnight our good lads yonder will have finished and filled the mine; at dawn we shall fire it. Then the props will burn through, down will come the roof of the mine, and half the wall with it. Then hey! To storm the breach, to scatter this rabble of Rocca Forte like sheep! It will be the easiest conquest I ever made."

"And the safest, most comfortable meal I ever cooked in camp," the other replied. "Not a catapult have they on the walls to harrass us, not a mangonel, and their archers can not reach us."

"It goes ill with the host whose leader is a woman," laughed Hugo, wiping the grease from his mouth.

WILD cries of fear and consternation rang out suddenly from the belly of the cat. Instantly Hugo was on his feet, running toward the entrance to the sap, and shouting to his trumpeter to sound "To arms!" But before he could reach the scene, sappers and miners erupted in a stream from the wooden shed, and casting aside their tools, fled in panic toward the camp. The men-at-arms supporting them, tearing off their armor that they might flee more swiftly, raced in disorder across the open. Here was a golden opportunity for the archers of the garrison; but not an arrow flew from the wall—indeed, its parapet seemed utterly empty of defenders.

Knowing that the besieged had no sally-port, Hugo's first thought was that they had sprung some sort of counter-mine, and had made a sortie underground, driving out his miners by sheer weight of numbers. Calling loudly upon the fugitives to rally, he sprang over the earthwork to meet them, to beat them into some kind of order and lead them back against the foe.

"To your work, knaves!" he roared, brandishing his sword.

But none heard him; none had eyes for him; straight on they came, their eyes rolling with fright.

And before he could reach them, before they could explain the cause of their terror, he saw pouring down the sap beside him—not the spears of the defenders, but a thick, rolling stream of muddy water. Swelling and rising, thickening and gaining power, it flooded the excavation to its very top. Rocking violently, the cat lurched, heaved, and was flung bodily up and over backward, into what was already a shallow lake. Where the machine had stood, a huge geyser of brown water spouted up from the foot of the wall nearly to its crest.

The earth trembled. Such of the cattle as were yet alive bellowed hoarsely, tore up the stakes which held them, and stampeded down the pass. Snorting with fright, the troop-horses followed them with thundering hoofs, charging down upon the soldiers.

"Flee for your lives!" cried the chief engineer, as he came panting up to his lord. "The witch of Rocca Forte has turned a river on us! Down the pass, before ye drown!"

The companies of men-at-arms and

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artificers, who had sprung to arms to defend the camp, broke and ran, the stampeded beasts trampling in among them. For a moment, Hugo stood as if stupefied; then he too turned and fled. His faithful horse, trembling, wide-nostriled, waited loyally till his master vaulted to the saddle, then whirled about and galloped for safety.

The flight became a mad rout; glancing over their shoulders as they rounded the bend, the fugitives saw the water-spout grow thicker and higher, as it tore its way through the crumbling mine. In a few minutes at most, the projecting angle of the wall must collapse, the whole wall be torn away by the surge of the pent-up waters, and the pass become a roaring torrent. Spurring behind his men, Hugo knew that they must be out of that deadly gorge before the stream came down upon them, or perish ignominiously in its muddy waves. On, on they ran, as they had never run from any living foe. Those who had not already cast aside all encumbrances threw swords, spears, helmets away as a sacrifice to the threatening deluge, thinking only of escape.

The only man whose horse had not bolted at the first scent of the danger, Hugo rode through his whole army, shouting aloud as he dashed through the mob:

"Aghlab's Stair! Make for the stair!"

There was no other hope. Well he knew, well every man among them knew, that they could never reach the mouth of the pass before that avalanche of water would be upon them. They could hear it roaring hungrily behind, could smell it, could almost feel its cold spray wetting them.

Riding furiously, Hugo reached the stair minutes ahead of the first of his warriors. The sight of the gleaming helmets above the rampart, of the menacing spears, was the sweetest joy he had ever tasted. There was no time for parley, no chance to force their way up the narrow cleft against the boulders which the men of Rocca Forte would hurl down upon them. There was only one way to save their lives, and Hugo took it without a second's thought. Spurring his horse as far up the stair as he dared, he shouted:

"I yield! Give us passage, or we die!"

As the words left his lips, a rumbling crash behind told him that the wall had fallen. Close upon it came the surging roar of mighty waters. His lips paled.

"Come up in peace!" Jaufré bellowed above the din.

Hugo needed no other assurance. Straight up Aghlab's Stair he rode; but now his men had reached its foot, crowded behind him, pushed in panic terror, and rushed into the cleft, forcing him and his horse ahead of them. Scarcely was the last man safe behind the sheltering corner of the mountain wall, when a mighty cataract swept down where they had been, passed them and rushed on, bearing timbers, pots, pans, shields, a half-submerged catapult, and all the various wreckage of the camp on the crest of its rolling waters. Its spume, leaping upward as it hit the foot of the cleft, drenched the rearmost fugitives.

The soldiers of Rocca Forte, lining the top, cheered the beaten host as it scrambled to safety. Hardly a man, save Gaultier's fifty who had watched the stair, had retained his weapons; the few who still clung to sword or ax now gladly relinquished them at the command of the victors. Most kindly did the men of Rocca Forte receive their unbidden guests on the broad plateau at the top. Jaufré courteously declined Hugo's offered sword; the soldiers of Corleone were marched away under escort of a strong guard, but no man mocked, or even smiled, at their plight.

With grave courtesy, Jaufré led the captive Hugo by a mule-path over the ridge. After half an hour's devious ride, they came to an exquisite little Moorish villa, built centuries before by some beauty-loving Emir, its limestone walls and graceful Saracen arches now rose-stained by the sunset light. On three sides of it were well-tended gardens; and in front lay the fresh-drained bed of what had been a wide, spring-fed lake.

Dismounting, the two captains passed under the pointed central arch, on to a colonnaded portico. As his foot touched the flagged pavement, Hugo stopped short in amazement. A girl, marvelously beautiful, was just rising from a marble bench, and was advancing to meet him. Her clinging garments were of the finest, daintiest silk; her lovely face and rounded arms were dark and warm against the creamy white of her dress; her hair hung in tawny glory over her shoulders. And now she took his hand in hers, and led him into a sumptuously appointed hall, bright with the red light through its many

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arches. A table was set in the center of the hall, rich with silver and golden dishes, set for two.

His eyes never left her. When he recovered from his first surprise, he gasped—

"Are you the Lady Fulvia?"

She smiled kindly.

"I am the Countess of Rocca Forte," she answered.

Her meaning was plain. Swallowing his defeat as well as he could, Hugo replied:

"Countess you are, and a brave and wise soldier too. I have already surrendered to your officer; I submit myself to your will."

"Then be seated and eat. No? At least you will drink." And she poured out the wine with her own hand.

He drank, set the glass down, and looked fixedly at her.

"How did you do it?" he asked.

Fulvia pointed through the arches to the muddy bed of the lake.

"Till a week ago," she said, "the road from Palermo to Castrocavalli wound through the Pass of Blood, near and below the foot of that lake. I bade my men build a wall across the gorge at a point where the road rises steeply, and when the wall was built, cut through the bank which separated the lake from the road. The wall was then a dam, with the lake held behind it, the steep slope of the old road assuring a strong head of water.

"Because it had battlements upon it, you attacked the dam as if it had been a city wall. When your engineers undermined that sharp salient—which was built to tempt you—down came the waters. While your miners were at work, my archers had orders to shoot sparingly, and to see that their arrows missed. I knew that you would be forced back upon Aghlab's Stair, that you could not climb it if I chose to defend, and that unless you climbed, you would all be drowned. Life is sweet, and you were sure to surrender."

"But my spies told me nothing of this," Hugo stammered.

"Surely not. My men-at-arms were posted on the heights above the pass and about the lake so that not even a fox could get through. Your spies saw nothing, and were forced to reconnoiter the pass from below, where they saw only the wall. I did not attempt to hold the pass farther down, for I did not wish to shed blood, having sworn to capture you without the loss of a single life. All you did, all you thought, was in accord with my design. Even the timber piled up at the farm——"

"Was left there that I might build cats, mantlets, and pavisses, and undermine the wall," Hugo completed. "And I thought it was all woman's ignorance! Your father was a great soldier, and my comrade; but you have thrice his cunning. What is it your pleasure to do with your prisoners?"

Fulvia smiled dazzlingly upon him.

"Say rather my guests," she said. "I shall keep you here for a while, Seignior. Your skill in siege-craft and the valor of your men are of great value to the king, who, I think, will grant me anything rather than lose them. I shall send letters to his Majesty concerning you, and I urge you to write him in support of my petition."

KING ROGER of Sicily, clad in an Arab burnoose pinned up to his knees, thrust his feet gingerly into the marble fountain in the palace-gardens. His strong face was set in lines of grave thought; but a smile lurked in the corners of his eyes, as he reread the parchment in his hands.

"And I most earnestly beg your Majesty, of your great grace, to grant the Lady Fulvia her petition to remain unwed, and bestow upon her the title to her father's lands; else I must remain here in pleasant bondage while your armies wait for me in vain. I renounce all claim to her hand; it is delightful to be her guest, but she is too masterful to be the wife of a quiet man."

The king smiled broadly now.

"That old war-dog!" he said to himself. "She must be masterful indeed, to have captured him. She has proved her case, and will hold her estates strongly. Here, Ali Hassan!"

The Moslem minister hastened up.

"Fulvia, daughter of my old friend Arnulfo, is to be made Countess of Rocca Forte and Castrocavalli," said the king. "Her petition is granted; send a messenger to her at once, to report it to her. Do you understand?"

Ali Hassan lifted his eyes toward heaven.

"Great is Allah!" he murmured, "who exalts maidens above captains, and puts fear into the souls of kings!"

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The Immaculate Murder

by Octavus Roy Cohen & Eric Levison

THE U. S. S. *Springfield* screamed a greeting from her siren as she came alongside the careening docks in the North Basin of the River Plate, below the *Retiro* Station of Buenos Aires. Sailors scurried hither and thither about the decks; orders were given sharply and obeyed promptly; port officials swarmed aboard before the making-fast process had been well completed; gangways were run out fore and aft, and, in a surprisingly short while, the huge gray battle-ship assumed the appearance of being quite at home in her berth, though some nine thousand miles from her home port.

The burly, two-hundred-pound ship's cook waddled across the deck and to a hatch amidships. He started to descend the ladder, without first taking the precaution of looking down, which accounts for the irritable hail that came from below as the cook's ponderous feet began to move downward:

"Hey, you big slob! Can't you see I'm coming up?"

The cook reappeared on deck and stood aside as a fiery-headed bantamlike man, whose rating badge testified that he was a coxswain, ran up the ladder and leaped nimbly to the deck.

"Why don't you look where you're goin', you big beef!"

The cook, muttering beneath his breath, but not risking a verbal set-to, scowled blackly and turned to the hatch, just as the little man began a long tirade dealing with the imporous qualities of all cooks' heads, and the head of the *Springfield's* cook in particular. His words rolled forth with a fluency born of long practise, and, had he not been interrupted, would have flung invective until the cook's head disappeared below. A hail from across the deck, however, broke into his monologue—

"Hey, Smitty!"

And Smitty turned to see McIntyre, a seaman, who was a trainer in the for'rad turret in which Smitty was a gun-pointer, gesticulating wildly.

The rookie who had seen the passage of evil looks between Smitty and the cook, and who had marveled heretofore at the apparent undying enmity that existed between the cook and the whole crew of the forward turret, sought out, "Old Sails,"

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the sailmaker's mate on the forecastle head, and demanded an explanation.

Old Sails chuckled throatily as he explained to the rookie the reason of the feud between the gun-crew and the cook; the *causus belly* as Old Sails called it.

"It started on the range off Hampton Roads at target practise, where it was an even bet that either us or the *Monongahela* would win. A bunch off that ship comes lookin' for bets that their for'rad turret would outshoot ours. Cookie had a roll in his sock, an' he felt it was a sure thing, 'cause Smitty is the best pointer in the outfit, son, an' he has a gun in that for'rad turret—so cookie bets the roll.

"But he wasn't takin' no chances, that cook. He was standin' in right with the gun-crew, and feed! Gosh! He fed 'em like the C. P. O. mess; toastin' bread for 'em, an' makin' 'em pies, an' even drawin' coffee for 'em in that percolator o' his. An' that, son, is sure something for cookie to do. He's got a special percolator that he makes his own coffee in. It's all bright an' shiny, an' he keeps it safe an' locked up the time he ain't makin' coffee for hisself, or polishin' the thing up."

The rookie began to see light.

"And we got beat?" he questioned.

"Beat?" Old Sails chuckled reminiscently. "Worse 'n that, son. All Smitty scored was two 'way outside an' four clean swabos out o' six shots. An' when the lieutenant asks him what was wrong, Smitty laid it on the cook's pies, claimin' they'd give him cramps an' he just couldn't point. But does cookie believe this? Nope. He thinks Smitty had a grudge agin' him, an' missed on purpose. They been scrappin' ever since, Smitty's gun-crew an' everybody else, an' they torment the cook's life out. Now Smitty says——"

"What you sayin' 'bout me?" questioned Smitty, insinuating himself between Old Sails and the rookie.

"Just tellin' him why you an' the cook has it in for each other."

"His fault," vouchsafed Smitty. "He give me cramps with his apple-pie. He says I can't shoot, an' I'll leave it to you, Sails, if I didn't get five bull's-eyes the next day with the same gun."

Smitty was exceedingly proud of his record, and of the little white circle with its crossed wires, which reposed on his sleeve and denoted the gun-pointer.

"If he hadn't made me sick with that pie an' the coffee cooked in that darned old per—per——"

The market on inspiration is not cornered by genius; or, if that be not so, then Smitty, by logical deduction, was a genius. He never finished the word "percolator." Instead he straightened rigidly and a beatific smile overspread his wizened features. Of a sudden he turned, dashed amidships and disappeared abruptly down the hatch, yelling wildly for McIntyre and Calvin, the sight-setter. Old Sails grinned as he looked after the flying form and turned to the open-mouthed rookie.

"Keep a watch out, son. Smitty's got an idea, an' when he gets 'em there's most usual something doing—very much doing."

Meanwhile Smitty had found Calvin and McIntyre sitting on their ditty-boxes in the six-bell compartment, carefully polishing their shoes, for the inspection that was to take place before the liberty party checked out, and laying unsatisfactory plans to jar more blasphemy from the cook. At sight of Smitty's face they grinned appreciatively.

"What is it?"

"You got an idea, I'll bet."

Smitty struck a pose, after the style of Commodore Perry in the famous painting that decorates a stairway in the capitol at Washington.

"It's a peach!"

"What is it?"

"Why didn't we think of it before?" gasped Smitty.

"Don't know. Tell us and I'll answer."

Smitty dropped on the deck and lowered his voice discreetly.

"You'll be game?"

"Will I? Watch me."

Calvin had not yet quite recovered from the ignominy of the fact that he—a seaman—had been detailed by a jocular jimmy-legs to peel potatoes for the detested cook no more than two days ago. As for McIntyre, he waited with ill-concealed impatience.

"Let's have it, Smitty."

"I'll tell you——"

Smitty edged closer and glanced around, as though fearful that a word might be caught by the wrong pair of ears.

"It's the per—per—*perc'lator!*"

"The percolator? What about it?"

McIntyre smiled slowly as he caught the

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drift of Smitty's inspirational idea. He slapped the little coxswain enthusiastically on the leg.

"Atta boy!" he cried delightedly. "What won't he say!"

"For the love of Mike," growled the slower-minded Calvin. "Let me in on it, won't you? I ain't no mind-reader."

Smitty chuckled.

"Cookie likes coffee, don't he?"

"Ye-e-s."

"He likes it a heap, eh? And he's too darned good to drink the stuff he boils for us in the big kettle in the galley—he's gotta make his own coffee in that shiny per—perc'lator of hisn; ain't that a fact?"

"Yes."

"An' he loves that perc'lator about as much as some men love other men's wives, huh?"

"What's it all about?" Calvin was plainly bewildered.

"You darned nut," piped Smitty. "We'll steal the perc'lator."

"Huh——"

Calvin gradually caught the idea, but the grin which appeared died rapidly.

"Let's do something easy," he suggested caustically, "like swipin' the skipper's dress uniform or breakin' into the canteen or heavin' a fourteen-inch gun overboard. A fat chance we'll have of gettin' our hands on—why say, d'yuh know that cookie locks the thing up every night, an' between messes?"

"Sure, but——"

Smitty's remark was interrupted by the welcome hail of a boatswain's mate, whose voice echoed down the decks—

"L-l-l-l-la-a-a-a-y a-a-a-a-a-ft a-a-a-a-l-l-l-l the liberty party!"

THE summons was obeyed with alacrity, and, as the party gathered on the deck, it was eyed pessimistically by the stern-faced officer of the deck as the roll was called, the men checked out, and the shore migration put well under way.

The officer of the deck beckoned Smitty out of line and eyed him gravely. The officer of the deck was also Smitty's division commander.

"Cox'n, you will please remember that the *caña* sold ashore yonder—" he designated the streets of the city with a comprehensive wave of his hand—"is fiery stuff. You will look after your men, I hope."

Smitty saluted smartly.

"Yes, sir. I know it sir. Been here before. We'll not harm the natives, sir."

The O. D. grinned in spite of himself.

"And mind," he chuckled, "that none of your crowd run foul of the cook. I understand that the gunnery and culinary divisions of this ship are not on the best of terms."

Smitty smiled broadly, and, with a final salute, ran lightly down the gangway to join his shipmates who had waited with some patience, principally, perhaps, because Smitty was treasurer for the party, and without him it would have been a boresome and exceedingly dry evening.

"What'd he hand you?" questioned Calvin.

"Who?"

"The O. D."

"Oh, him," retorted Smitty loftily, as though he and the young officer were bosom friends. "He just wished me a pleasant time an' said he hoped I'd take one for him."

"Yeh—whatcha think I am, a marine?"

Smitty led his party into the main street of the Buenos Aires water-front, the *Paseo de Julio*, and it was not many minutes before his sharp eyes discovered a café with its tables scattered about helter-skelter on the sidewalk in imitation of the high-toned cafés on the *Avenida de Mayo*. They descended on the place with a whoop of joy, and an apprehensive *mozo* slouched out of the café to do their bidding

"*Vino!*" ordered Smitty, grandiloquently, "*Rapido! Quicko!*" Thus he demonstrated to the full and entire satisfaction of his gun-crew that even a knowledge of Spanish was numbered among the many accomplishments of their gun-pointer.

The *mozo* disappeared, to return in a moment with a bottle and sundry chipped glasses. Smitty did the honors and thirstily gulped a glass of the red wine while the *mozo* buzzed about officiously, arranging and rearranging chairs and tables—and keeping his sharp eyes on the rapidly disappearing wine. To the casual eye his interest might have appeared merely professional, but a student of naval tactics could have discerned the fact that he had taken up a strategic position calculated to enable him to cut off any sudden retreat of the drinking party before financial settlement had been made.

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Smitty again exercised a moiety of his stock of Spanish when he waved the *mozo* to him imperiously.

"*Vino! Mucho more vino!*"

The *mozo* eyed him frigidly and filliped his fingers with the Esperantic sign which means "Shell out." Smitty calmly flipped a five-dollar gold piece upon the table-top, and the *mozo's* eyes gleamed, reveling in the knowledge that sudden affluence had indeed descended upon him. He departed hastily to secure the desired wine.

An hour passed, and from this particular café there came a decided sound of revelry by night. Smitty led the singing in a high falsetto which affected the sensitive nerves of the *mozo* in no undecided fashion. It also attracted the attention of one Acosta Larguia, by profession a vigilante. Larguia shambled to the general vicinity of the café which served good cheer to the *Americanos*, and lounged idly against a pillar, his left hand playing about the hilt of his sword, while his right hand clutched tightly the little white billy with which every Buenos Aires policeman is equipped.

And there he lounged, comparatively near to the joyous sailors in their dress blues, and eventually old Morpheus came along and clasped Acosta Larguia in his arms, where he would have slept indefinitely had not the eagle-eye of Smitty, gun-pointer in the forward turret of the U. S. S. *Springfield*, lighted on him.

"Lookit it!" howled Smitty, pointing to the diminutive form with its blue helmet and nickeled badge; the patent leather strap under the chin; the black military blouse and black trousers. "It's a cop."

"Ish a sholdjer," denied Calvin thickly.

"Cop," combatted Smitty.

"How y' know?"

" 'Sleep!" muttered Smitty, and the argument was concluded in favor of the proponent.

Smitty was not content to let well enough alone. Before his companions divined his intentions, he had seized an empty wine bottle and hurled it in the general direction of the sleeping vigilante. It crashed into a thousand pieces at his feet, and his little eyes popped open—he stared, first with terror then with rage.

" 'Rah f'r Shtars 'n' Shtripes!" howled Smitty.

The vigilante ejaculated a stream of invective, which, fortunately for the peaceful relations existing between Argentina and the United States, the militant coxswain of the *Springfield* could not translate. At the same time he descended wrathfully upon the merrymakers. He was an extremely angry little vigilante and he flourished his snow-white billy combatively.

Smitty rose to his feet somewhat unsteadily, swayed slightly, and managed to execute a low bow, grandiloquently flourishing his flat-hat. The vigilante's profanity trailed off to nothingness, and then his eye caught Calvin's extended hand which held forth, very invitingly, a brimming glass.

Wine was the besetting weakness of the vigilante. Also, it was patent that he had made a diplomatic blunder in growing angry with these friendly *Americanos*. He gazed covertly about, saluted pompously, expressed in glowing Spanish his undying admiration for *Tio* Sam and all that pertained to him, accepted the glass and drained it expertly.

"Thash th' good old shport," applauded Calvin, and one and all they hailed him as a comrade after their own hearts.

The vigilante took another drink with them—and another. As a matter of fact, he imbibed with too great frequency: he became mellow. And then he announced suddenly that he would stand treat. Smitty, Calvin, McIntyre, *et als*, refused to listen to this proposal until Acosta Larguia had declaimed at length upon the twin facts of his riches and his desire to show true Argentine hospitality. The sailors withdrew their objections in the face of the verbal batteries and Larguia summoned the *mozo*.

One comprehensive sweep of his uniformed arm and a spurt of rapid-fire Spanish informed that servitor that the best of wine, and the best only, was to be served to these friends of Argentina. The wine was served and the little vigilante did the honors:

"Acosta Larguia toasts the *Americanos!*" he orated.

Glasses clinked.

" 'Rah f'r Lager!" chanted Smitty, and the contents of their glasses gurgled down their respective throats.

The *mozo* hove to in the offing and awaited his money. Acosta sensed the significance of the move and drew from his pocket a roll of bills which made the bleared

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eyes of the for'rad turret gun-crew stand out in amazement.

"Good gosh! Lookit the money!"

Larguia grandly stripped a gaudy ten-peso note from the outside of the mammoth roll and tossed it to the pop-eyed *mozo* with a gesture of aristocratic disdain.

"Bein' a cop," volunteered Calvin, "must be a pipe in this Boy-nos Air-ees place."

Larguia sensed the drift of the observation, even though the words themselves were beyond his understanding.

"I have won in the lottery," he declaimed grandly. "Acosta Larguia is a rich—an exceedingly rich man."

Smitty caught the word "Lottery," and the rest was plain sailing for his deductive mind. Thereafter he did not stand back when Larguia offered to treat—which was very often indeed.

THE night passed slowly. The sailors and the vigilante reached that stage of intoxication which brought peace to their hearts and kind thoughts toward their fellow men. Smitty suggested a drive into the country. Larguia had done the honors sufficiently. He should now go as guest of the gun-crew, who appreciated a true gentleman—as they informed him severally and jointly—at his true worth.

"Why sh'd walk?" questioned Smitty of no one in particular. "We're 'Merican sailors—we sh'd ride."

Whereupon Acosta tossed a five-peso note to the *mozo* by way of gratuity, and the party sallied forth in search of a conveyance to the chorus of a burst of *"Gracias, señores, gracias!"* from the *mozo*.

Down the street they rambled, singing lustily the chorus of a song, the one intelligible word of which was "Josephina." At a dark and odoriferous corner they came upon a dilapidated hack, between the shafts of which drowsed an ancient steed. The *cochero* was nowhere in sight.

It was the work of a moment to release the scrawny horse, which very promptly sank down and came to a peaceful rest on the sidewalk. Then Smitty, Calvin, McIntyre and one other hove the slightly worse-for-wear Acosta Larguia into the cab, while four lusty, bellowing bluejackets grabbed the shafts and started the cab careening down the deserted street.

They were a happy lot, a decidedly happy lot. Their voices rose to the high heavens in open harmony—Smitty always about three and a half beats ahead of his nearest competitor. So intent did he become in maintaining this lead that he failed to observe two very important things; the first was that the inebriated Acosta Larguia succumbed to the numerous alcoholic potations that had found their way to his stomach, and keeled over the edge of the seat in profound and sonorous slumber; his head bobbing up and down in a ghastly fashion with each roll of the seafaring hack.

The second was that he forgot—if, indeed, he had ever known—that near the corner of the *Calle Tucuman* and *Paseo de Julio* the order-loving administration of the capital of Argentina has erected a branch police station. This station the merry-makers drew abreast of, and passed, with no diminution in the volume of their song.

As they swept regally past the building, bound for the open, rolling country, little brown-faced vigilantes, in various stages of undress, clustered to the windows and stared in open-mouthed amazement at the weird sight. And then one of them caught sight of the helpless Acosta Larguia. A tiny officer barked commands, and order reigned where but a minute before had been chaos and amazement.

The cab continued its bumpy uneven way in a general southerly direction, in compliance with Smitty's shouted injunctions that the course lay "due Sou'," until the trusty, blue-jacketed steeds became a bit tired and wholly uncertain in their steps. Quite suddenly, in the midst of a semi-extemporaneous verse, in which all the singers sought to do proper homage to the pulchritude of the incomparable "Josephina," the cab brought up abruptly against a sturdy telegraph pole, shivered a moment, then crashed into bits after the far-famed manner of the wonderful one-horse chaise.

It was but a mere incident in this night of nights, and Smitty shrilly piped the command to "Abandon ship." The seamen gaily turned their steps back to the lights of Buenos Aires, forgetting in their intoxication, the helpless little vigilante, who continued to sleep blissfully under what had been the rear-seat of the vehicle.

Fortunately—or perhaps under the direction of the angel which guides the feet of fools and drunken men—they avoided the street that would have carried them by

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the branch police station. Toward the careening docks they made their way—bound for shipboard, when Smitty stopped short and struck an attitude.

"Hist, mates! We've forgot something."

The crowd drew up in swaying dignity.

"Whash it?" queried one.

Smitty flourished his arms.

"'S the perc'lator."

They belabored him mightily, thus showing their appreciation of his fertile brain. The percolator to be sure; they had forgotten that this was the night to steal it and wreak their dire vengeance on the cook for his long-drawn-out series of petty persecutions, which dated back to the fiasco on the range and the cook's sudden fall from the ranks of bloated plutocrats.

Realization of the magnitude of the task that faced them served to sober them for a moment. Here was a task that demanded clear heads and an ability in the exercise of *finesse*. Smitty, Calvin and a seaman named Garris were promptly detailed to do the nefarious work of stealing the cherished percolator. They started in a crowd to the dock, their singing temporarily shelved in view of the gravity of the task which faced them.

But events were transpiring of which the sailors recked not. Less than a block away a squad of uniformed and highly militant vigilantes slunk along in the shadows, their keen little eyes never for a moment losing sight of the enthusiastic *Americanos*.

The sailors reached the dock and Smitty and Calvin and Garris made straight for the forward gangway, leaving the rest of the crowd in darkness. McIntyre managed to secure a piece of rope from somewhere, as the selected thieves made their way aboard.

Luck played into the hands of the marauding trio. The rookie was on watch at the gangway, and the rookie was deliciously asleep. It was the work of but a few moments to sneak into the galley, take therefrom the cook's ditty-box, in which was securely locked the beloved percolator. Smitty, carrying the box, shielded by the bodies of Calvin and Garris, crept cautiously by the dozing rookie without awakening him. Time enough later for some officer to attend to that little ceremony.

On the dock again they motioned triumphantly to the rest of the gun-crew who took shape out of the shadows like a crowd of uniformed specters. Toward the end of the dock they crept, Smitty still carrying carefully the ditty-box, and McIntyre holding tightly to his valuable piece of rope.

The vigilantes crept closer. In the dim light they could barely discern the sailors making fast what appeared to be a small casket to a piece of rope. Then casket and rope disappeared and a gasp of horror arose from the cautious Argentine policemen. Smitty made fast the rope to the dock, and turned triumphantly to his companions.

"There," he sibilated. "It's done, an' when cookie finds his ol' perc'lator's been drowned——"

Smitty chuckled in anticipatory glee.

"We ain't goin' to leave it there, are we?"

"Na-a. Just long 'nough to make him think it's gone f'r good."

Now that the serious business of the night had been completed the fumes of the *vino* once more rose to the occasion, and the men realized that neither their shore-leave nor their money had yet expired. Under those conditions but one thing there was to do, and, at Calvin's inspired suggestion they rolled away once more in search of their café on the *Paseo de Julio*. The vigilantes hid themselves in the shadows as they went by; then, at a word of command from their diminutive officer, they followed in a body.

The café was discovered with the *mozo* eager to do his small part to make the evening successful. After a while Smitty waxed oratorical and mounted to a table, from which vantage-point he orated loud and long on the amicable relations that had always existed, and always would exist between that entirely delightful country known as the Republica Argentina, and Columbia the gem of the ocean! All this to the prolonged and continuous applause of McIntyre and a single pediculus-infested beachcomber who had ambitions for still another drink of *caña*.

Never forgetting that in the shadow of an alley the squad of vigilantes watched with a sleepless intensity.

Eventually the funds of the expedition ran out, and, because there was no *vino* to be had without the *moneda nacional*, and no amusement without *vino*, Smitty led his cohorts in a zigzag journey, which he afterward proudly and fondly described as

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"straight as a bee-line to the ship, an' me three sheets in the wind."

In the vicinity of the dock, Smitty and his crew ran flush into the arms of a chief master-at-arms who took the gorgeously inebriated gun-crew under his official wing where they remained until safely aboard the *Springfield*, and locked fast in the brig—with the superfluous injunction from the master-at-arms to "sleep it off."

They slept it off with a vengeance, their snores echoing loudly through the brig, the faces of the men beatific in the subconsciousness of past happiness. Then something quire unforeseen occurred.

BY ALL the rules of shipboard they should have been awakened at five o'clock by the shrill piping of the boatswain's mate's whistle—but their drugged sleep ended a full half-hour earlier, when a drowsy but wild-eyed master-at-arms entered the brig and proceeded to prod the prostrate men vigorously. They grunted protestingly, and protestingly rose to sitting postures. Smitty's fighting blood rose to the surface—such as had not reached his head and caused that member to throb as though it would burst.

"Whatcha want. Can'tcha leave a fellow alone?"

"Git up!" snapped the master-at-arms. "There's —— to pay!"

"Huh? What y' talkin' about?"

"You've played thunder, that's what. I don't know exactly what you done, but it's something."

"Ain't done a thing!" And Smitty sought solace in sleep.

The master-at-arms shoved him with a square-toed shoe. Smitty rose wrathfully:

"You jimmy-legs 'r gettin' too blamed ——"

"Aw, lay off that, Smitty," the master-at-arms broke in, "the skipper wants you."

"Th' skipper!"

"Yes. He wants the whole lot of you, an' he's mad as six wet hens."

"Th' skipper," Smitty awakened immediately, and his eyes wandered to the tense faces of his companions. "Holy smoke! What happened?"

They shook their heads mournfully in unison, and declared stoutly that they knew not.

"You'd better shake a leg," advised the master-at-arms; "the old man ain't goin' to wait all day."

Protesting, incredulous and frightened, Smitty and his crew stumbled out of the brig. As they passed the galley the cook stuck his rotund face out and grinned cheerfully at them.

" 'Lo boys. Have a good time ashore?"

Smitty favored him with a ferocious glance.

"You go to ——!"

The forward turret crew stumbled up the ladder and were then marched directly aft. There they came upon the captain, whose usually genial face was sternly set and whose evident fury was made more evident by the fact that he wore an unbuttoned uniform and bedroom slippers. But it was not the irate captain who struck terror to Smitty's heart. It was a squad of uniformed, excitedly voluble vigilantes who buzzed about the deck.

Smitty was conscious of a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach at the sight of the party on the quarter-deck. It was plain that something was materially wrong—and Smitty racked his tortured head that he might remember. The vigilantes were all talking at once, each a veritable verbal Gatling. The captain was scarlet-faced, and patently on the defensive before the onslaught of Spanish. He was waving his hands, helplessly repeating: "*No comprende! No comprende!*" as fast as he could utter the words.

Evidently his statement had no effect on the vigilantes who hesitated in their voluble jabbering not one whit. A young ensign, full to overflowing with painfully acquired Spanish, took a hand and strove vainly to glean enough of a story to translate to the captain. He was learning very rapidly, this ambitious young ensign, that there is Spanish and the *idioma nacional*—and that this latter was not the academic language at which he had been so proficient in Maryland.

Smitty and his sadly bedraggled companions drew up stiffly before the irate captain and saluted. Instantly a vigilante, more brilliantly uniformed than his companions—thereby proving himself an officer—leaped forward and waved a pair of shining handcuffs under Smitty's nose, and for once in his eventful life Smitty would have gladly relinquished the spotlight. The master-at-arms stepped briefly between Smitty and the vigilante, and Smitty thanked the master-at-arms with a look.

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The captain turned helplessly to the young ensign.

"Can you make anything of it?" he appealed.

The ensign struggled nobly.

"*Espere un momento*—wait a minute! Oh! The devil! *Keep quiet!*"

Thereupon he listened intently to the profuse story of the chief vigilante, and as he listened his face grew very grave indeed; at length he turned incredulously to the captain.

"They say, sir," he translated seriously, "that a vigilante has been robbed and murdered!"

"What!". The face of the captain grew purple.

"Yes, sir. And that these men, under Smith's command, did it."

"So help me Pete—" started Smitty, now terrified; but the captain silenced him shortly.

"This is serious," said the captain. "Ask them what they know about it, and how these men come to be suspected."

Again bedlam and excited gestures. The ensign reported briefly:

"They claim there isn't a doubt of it. Smith here is alleged to have started it by assaulting a vigilante named Acosta Larguia, or something like that, with an empty wine-bottle. They forcibly detained this man and got him drunk. It seems that Larguia had with him a great deal of money that he had won in the lottery, and they knew it. Just when the murder occurred they do not seem to know, because there were no eye-witnesses, but later in the night these men passed a branch police station carrying the body of Larguia in a hack."

Smitty's knees were wabbling. He was as deadly sober as he had ever been in his life. He addressed the captain pleadingly.

"Honest to Gawd, Mr. Kern, I don't know what they're talkin' about. We didn't do a thing, sir—honest we didn't."

"Did you assault a vigilante with a bottle?"

"No sir."

"Smith, I want the truth. This man says——"

"But we didn't assault him, sir. I'll swear we didn't. We just threw a bottle at him kinda playful."

The captain choked.

"Threw a bottle! Smith, I'll——"

Smitty was pleading desperately:

"Honest, sir, it was only fun. An' we didn't hit him. Then he come over an' we took *one* drink. Just one! Ain't that so, Mac?"

He turned to the pasty-cheeked McIntyre for verification.

"Tell them what Smith says," ordered the captain, and the ensign hastened to obey.

A veritable stream of excited Spanish rose on the morning air; there was a wild, frantic waving of arms and dancing of uniformed legs. From out the chaos the perspiring ensign managed to glean one fact.

"They say, sir, that they can produce the dead body or the money of which it was robbed."

"Tell them to do it," snapped the captain. "Where is it?"

More labored translating by the ensign, then:

"They saw these men tie a rope to a box which contained either the body or the money, and hang it over the end of the dock. They left it there as proof."

Into Smitty's aching head there seeped a remembrance. His irrepressible humor asserted itself and he chuckled softly. The captain swung on him apoplectically.

"Smith, I've had enough of this! I——"

"It ain't that, sir," apologized the coxswain, grave again, although now a quizzical gleam had supplanted the fear that had been in his eyes. "It's—it's the—the—perc'lator."

Neither noticed the grinning face of the cook as that individual watched proceedings from behind a turret, alternately shaking with laughter and quaking with fear lest he be dragged into the mix-up.

"The what?" roared the captain.

"The perc'lator, sir."

"What are you talking about?" yelled the captain. "Are you still drunk?"

"No sir," meekly. "You see, sir, we hung it over the end of a dock so's——"

The captain whirled and led the way to the after gangway.

"We'll look into this," he snapped. "I intend to get to the bottom of it."

THE variegated procession made its way to the dock, and thence to the appointed spot. The chief of the vigilantes, chattering sentences which the ensign translated to mean that this was the very rope the body or money had been lowered on, clutched the hemp and gave it a yank.

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The rope came up.

There was nothing on the end of it!

Smitty went white. Ditto his companions. The vigilantes waved their arms. The captain and ensign stared at one another gravely. The thing was indeed serious: here the men admitted that they had sunk something.

"What did you say you sunk here?"

"A—a—a perc'lator, sir," answered Smitty in a small, weak voice.

"What are you talking about? Quick now! Out with it!"

"It—it was the cook's, sir."

"Go on." The captain's face was set in fury and unbelief.

"We—we haven't got on so very well with the cook, sir, for a long time. We made up our minds to get even, so we glommed—er—a—stole the perc'lator last night. It was locked in his ditty-box, so we slipped it overboard on the end of a rope so's we could recover it before sailing time this morning. You see, sir, he makes his own coffee in this perc'lator thing an' won't drink what he dishes out to the mess——"

"Stick to your story!"

"We knew that'd get him worse'n anything we could do, an' so——"

"That is all?"

"Yes, sir."

"A very likely story. Smith, the web of circumstantial evidence is drawn very tightly about you. If you made a ditty-box fast to the end of this rope, where is it now?"

"I'm—I'm sure I don't know, sir."

"Of course you don't. And you admit that you assaulted the murdered vigilante with a wine-bottle."

"No sir—we just threw it at him kinda play——"

"Enough!"

The captain paced the dock fiercely. He was in a quandary. In the first place his orders were to sail that morning, and in the second place he did not doubt for a minute that his men had been in some fashion mixed up with the death of the vigilante. He knew enough to ascribe the whole thing to the *vino*—but the very fact that Smitty admitted to a few drinks made him positive that anything might have happened. And killing an officer of the law is no mean offense.

Smitty stared everywhere save at the faces of his fellow revelers. They were a sad crowd as they stood there, fidgeting nervously from one foot to the other, and staring with terrified eyes at the empty bit of rope which lay on the dock. Something was wrong—their plans had miscarried and they were in real trouble!

All turned at the sound of a clangor from up the street. Rushing pell-mell toward the dock came an ornate police patrol. The faces of Smitty and his cohorts blanched with fear, and Smitty formulated the opening sentence of an impassioned speech to the captain. The vigilantes broke into a renewed chatter.

Out of the patrol tumbled a half-dozen uniformed vigilantes—and then Smitty's eyes lighted. So also did the eyes of the vigilantes on the dock; the chief's popping with amazement!

"*Hay una equivocacion! Esto no esta bien!*"

The ensign translated with unusual facility.

"They say there is a mistake—that it is not correct—I do not understand any more."

The crowd from the patrol drew closer. Two of the men supported a third—a bedraggled but intensely happy individual who slewed dangerously as their grasps relaxed for so much as a second.

"It—it's Lager!" gasped Calvin.

"What's that?" snapped the captain.

"It's the dead man, sir," explained Smitty.

Acosta Larguia burst forth once more into song. He produced what remained of his lottery money and offered to treat the ship's crew, declaring not once, but a hundred times, that the men of *Tio* Sam were his friends forever.

Fortunately one of the new arrivals spoke passable English and he explained rapidly. He prefaced his remarks by profuse apologies and many bows; then went on to say that Acosta Larguia was a disgrace to Argentina generally and the police force of Buenos Aires in particular. He had become drunk while on duty, and had been found lying in a gutter far from his post. He had then managed to secure more drinks—where, no one knew—and was again intoxicated. It was quite a regrettable mistake.

He was not dead, and, of course, *Tio* Sam's sailors were not murderers. The apologies of the administration of the city of Buenos Aires were extended to the

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captain of the good ship *Springfield*, to his crew generally, and to the little gentleman with the red hair, and to the country of their nativity.

The captain's eyes gleamed suspiciously as he strode bruskly up the gangway and to his quarters. Smitty and his gun-crew, heartily relieved and vowing eternal sobriety, made their way aboard the ship. At length they passed the galley. The cook poked a provocative head toward them.

"A swell bunch of murderers you are."

Smitty whirled angrily.

"Yeh we are! I—I—say, Cookie. I'm darned sorry that perc'lator thing of yours got adrift. We'll buy you another when we get back to Newport."

"That's all right, Smitty. Say, will you guys have some coffee?"

"Sure."

They stared at him. Quite calmly he reentered the galley, and it speaks volumes that not one man remarked that he navigated like a duck. In a minute he returned with a cup and a shining nickeled percolator from which he poured a portion of the steaming liquid.

"You—you had another?"

"No. This is the same one."

"But—but—where——"

"I saw you when you swiped it, Smitty, and I followed you. When you beat it I h'isted it up. Here, drink this, it's darned good coffee, if I do say it."

Smitty took the cup in his hand, hesitated a second, then grinned a bit sheepishly—

"Here's to you, Cookie," he toasted, "and to the next time we get the *Monongahela* on the range!"

Nor did he complain when the steaming coffee burned his throat. Smitty was in no mood to be captious.

FIRES

BY CHARLES C. JONES

THE fire that glows in a club-room grate to welcome you will burn,
And the fire of a friend will keep you snug, nor of his choosing fail;
But the fire that's best in East or West and gives you most return,
Is the little fire you build yourself at the end of the day-long trail.

For your smoke goes up to the friendly stars, and the dark, close-watching, sees
How the red gleam plays on the dancing foam where the river sings its song;
And your meal is done and your pipe begun, and you smoke and stretch at ease,
And you look abroad on the Universe, and you know that you belong.

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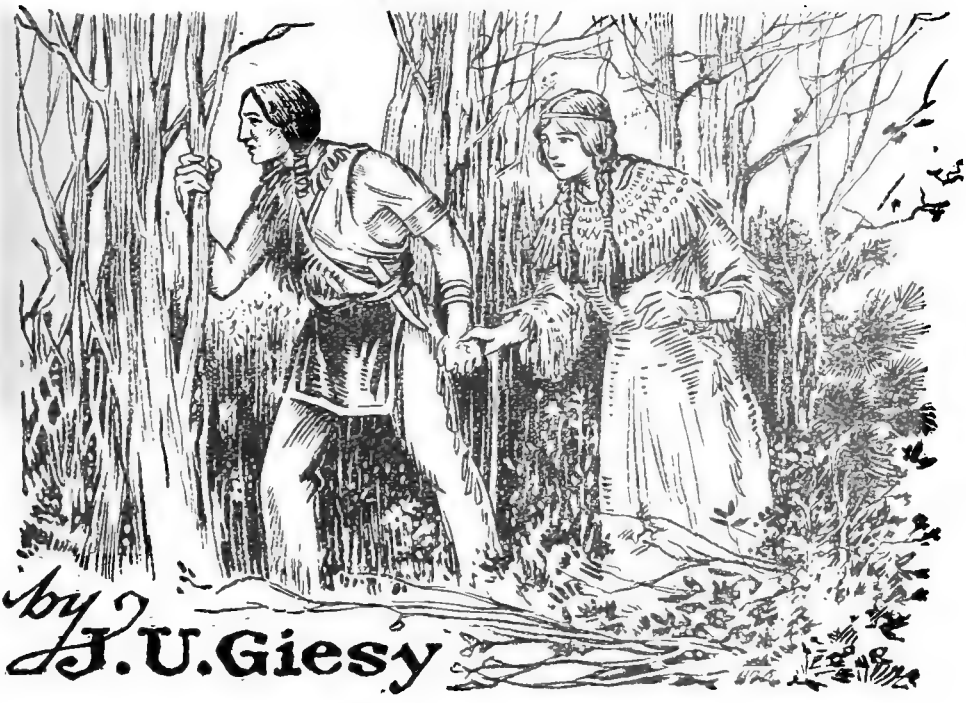
Red Acadia

A Four-Part Story—Conclusion



by J. U. Giesy

Author of "The Signal Fire," "The Return," etc.

CHAPTER XIII

"WHITE WOLF?" The maid's words were a question. I shook my head.

"I know not," I said, loath to voice even the thing which I feared.

But I turned away, intent on learning what had occurred at once.

"White Wolf!"

I paused. She stood there wide-eyed and pale.

"Remember—you stand between me and him."

"Aye," I cried and darted out of the gate, turning down the street between the peaceful gardens about the peaceful homes, toward the sound of strife in the camp.

Another shot cracked out—the snap of a rifle, cutting across the air of the early September day. It was followed by another and another, in a way which spoke of fresh weapons added momentarily to the conflict, whatever its nature might be. I heard them with a quickened beating of my heart as I ran. I had told Nashoba I could beat him at the running, and I proved it that day, even as I had proved it in the past.

Hence I came quickly to the camp to find it in swirling confusion, the tribesmen jammed together in a jostling group which shouted and pushed and swayed like to a very pack of fighting dogs about the spot where Elliott's tent had been.

I say "had been" since it was there no longer, though the pole bearing the flag still showed as a sort of center for the press of tightly packed men.

More shots popped out as I ran toward it, and I sensed they were being fired in the air, rather than with any intent to kill. The jets of fire and the curling feathers of smoke stabbed obliquely up from the lifted barrels. Yet as I drew nearer still I found

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that they had a target none the less. They were shooting at the flag.

Then I panted to a stand on the outer edge of the press, seeking to learn what had happened, making myself but one of the crowding men, who gave small heed to my presence, reaching finally a point from whence I could see, Pomoacan and his Wyandots, ringed in by the Shawnees, the Ottawas and our own men, standing face to face with Elliott and Pipe.

Later I was to learn how the Wyandots, angered beyond all control by Elliott's threat against themselves and their leader, had without warning attacked the Englishman's tent and thrown it down; and that Elliott, calling on his own and the other tribes for help, had thrown the entire camp into the mêlée; whereupon the Wyandots had begun shooting at the flag on its pole. But for the present I knew no more than what I could hear.

"Stop that shooting!" Elliott roared as another volley cracked out, and the flag leaped on its staff while the bullets tore it through.

He was brave in his way, as I had to admit, for he stood there not pale or afraid, but flushed, red-faced with rage, and his voice was the voice of an angry bear, or a bull.

Pomoacan folded his arms upon his breast and glared back at the white without speaking so much as a word to the men who had fired.

"Call off your men, Wyandot, and bid them set up my tent, you treacherous dog!" Elliott bellowed a fresh command.

And then Pomoacan spoke in a fashion he had never used before within my knowledge. His tones were calm, cold, and filled with the ring of truth:

"White cousin, you play with death. It may be that what you have foretold shall come upon my people. Yet should it do so, it will come upon them, only after the father is given full and just cause to act. My men are inflamed in their hearts by your words. Add no further fuel to the fire which burns in their breasts, lest it prove a reason for an injury to yourself, rather than to the colored rag which flaps now sorely wounded above your head."

My heart leaped, but Elliott sobered at the words. Of a sudden he appeared to realize the position in which he stood. He put off his bluster then, and stood eying the circle of dark, scowling faces which ringed him around, past any chance of escape. He must have known then how little it would take to cause them to turn upon him. For I saw him lick his lips and bite them before at the last he spoke.

"Speak, then, Wyandot—what is it they want?"

"This," Pomoacan said. "When you appeared at my house and asked me to undertake this mission against the praying people, you gave the command to my hand. Since we are here, my word has been in all things set aside. You say I have caused delay. I say to you now that you are the one who has caused it. I and my people stand ready to do that for which we came, insofar as it was agreed. Wherefore I ask that the command be from now until the end of this matter, mine; in token of which the flag at which my young men shoot shall be taken down."

It was a bold speech, but Elliott took it at a gulp. And after a whispered word to Pipe, he yielded.

"Let it be so, then. What will Pomoacan do?"

"Pomoacan will see these people removed at once *with* their teachers," the Wyandot half-king replied. "So was it agreed. So shall it be done. I have spoken, agent of the father at Detroit."

Elliott gave up. He must have seen he was beaten past help. For a moment he stared back, scowling into Pomoacan's face, then folded his arms.

"Let it be so. I have spoken," he agreed.

Pomoacan inclined his head. He spoke a word to his men. Instantly a dozen of their number flung themselves at the pole, where the torn flag floated. They tugged and strained until it swayed and slanted, and, as the men in the outer circle gave way before it, toppled and fell to the ground. With yells and hoots they threw themselves upon the flag, and tore it from the pole and rent it to ribbons before Elliott's eyes. Howling and hooting, they wound the rent tatters about their arms and bodies, or waved them in streaming fragments before Elliott's eyes. It was the answer of the Wyandot tribe to his threat.

Nor did the man make any protest, though I saw his hands clench and his lips draw back from his teeth. Not until the thing was done, did he open his lips. But

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then his voice rose loudly, envenomed with passion and hate.

"Listen to me, men of the Ottawas and Shawnees. Pomoacan has said these people shall be removed under his command. Wherefore it were foolish to leave aught of value behind in this place. Go—to the towns, here and below on the river! Take what you wish for your own!"

A ROAR of many voices greeted his words. Elliott—still to the majority the agent of Detroit—had given his permission to pillage the towns. The Shawnees and Ottawas lifted a shout of acclamation, while my own breath caught in my throat, at thought of what might well occur.

Oh, it was like Elliott to take advantage of the situation in such fashion. He knew the men he addressed. I think he hoped for a slaughter of the converts, at least of their teachers, to glut his rage of defeat.

And I know Captain Pipe, our leader, feared the selfsame thing. I saw him bend and speak quickly to Elliott. I saw Elliott wave him away with a gesture of negation and a tooth-baring smile as savage as a snarl.

Then Pipe himself lifted a hand.

"Take no life!" he thundered his command. "I, Pipe, Chief of the Delawares, command it. These men be our brothers, remember. Take, then, no life!"

But his words gained small response. Already men of the Shawnees and Ottawas were slipping from the press to run toward the town. All their savage desires had been unchained by Elliott's words; license was placed in their hands.

"Men of the Leni Lenape!" Once more Pipe's voice boomed forth. "Go to the help of your brothers. Place a guard about them. Kill not, save, to protect them. I, Pipe, command."

I heard no more. I turned away, running as I had never run before to regain the town through the first ruck which was streaming in that direction with whoops and yells of anticipation in their throats. In those few moments all the peace of the morning had been blotted out—changed into a scene of human passion let loose.

Later Nashoba told me that Pomoacan joined Pipe, crying to the Wyandots an order to stand by their leader's pledge. Plainly he knew he might not stem the tide of pillage and perhaps he thought it mattered little since the towns were to be abandoned so soon. But he strove to avoid bloodshed at least.

"Take what ye wish, but harm no one," he ended his command, bending like a wise man before what he could not control. And to the credit of our chiefs and our men, be it said that our leaders gained their end, and so once more brought Elliott's intent to naught. Hard on the heels of the first rush, the Delawares and Wyandots entered the town. And though they joined in the looting, they were strong enough in numbers to see that no blood was spilled.

Yet I could not know what might happen as I ran, bent on nothing save reaching Metta's side and standing between her and harm, in what was about to occur. And even so I was not so quick as those first who had slipped away, bent on gaining the pick of the loot for themselves. For as I entered the town I found the work in hand. There were Shawnees in the garden of the first house on the street. They were dragging out of the cabin every conceivable thing it contained to an accompaniment of hoots and yells.

I gave them small attention, though, as I ran past. Of the owners of the house I saw no sign, hence found no occasion to pause. My breath beginning to whistle in my throat, I ran on down the street, passing knots and groups of the converts standing huddled and terror-stricken, like dumb beasts before the storm of destruction let loose about their ears.

Then a man stood before me as I ran. Heckwelder's face, pale, twitching with emotion, was close to mine.

"My son," he gasped his question, "what does this thing mean?"

"Pillage," I told him. "You are to be removed. Pipe has ordered no killing, yet guard yourself well. Go to the church-house. Gather your people. I go to the maiden until this fire burns out."

He lifted his hands to the sky in a gesture of despair. I saw his lips quiver. Then—

"What God sends we must accept. Go to the maid and guard her well, my son," he said.

I left him standing there like one half-dazed and continued my course, passing the

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school and glancing within to find it deserted, and running straight on toward Big Owl's house. I reached it at last, flung myself through the gate and ran up the path to the door.

It was drawn back even as I lifted my hand to thrust it before me, and Metta appeared.

"White Wolf!" she exclaimed.

"Tell your people to gather their blankets and such few things as they may quickly get together and come with me to the church," I cut her short. "Elliott has loosed his Shawnees and Ottawas on the towns to loot them. There is no time to talk."

For a moment she stared wide-eyed.

"It is the end," she said then and turned to her foster-parents, repeating my words.

Without a murmur they set about collecting what few of their possessions they might, throwing them upon blankets spread upon the floor. Inside five minutes, while the yells of the pillagers came slowly nearer along the street, the thing was done. We knotted the ends of the blankets, converting each into a bundle, took them up and left the house, to make our way to the church.

Looking back one could see the men from the camp, swarming the yards, running from side to side of the lane between them, in an indiscriminate crowd. Beyond their van, farther along the way they had come a cabin was burning, having been set afire in wanton fashion. The black smoke rose above it and mounted in a cloud, shot through with flame.

Metta drew closer to me as we went. I heard her breath catch as we ran. Her face was pale, her mouth set, her eyes dark and wide like those of a child. I put a hand beneath her arm and gave her support. A Shawnee sprang from a yard and darted toward us, sighting the bundles we carried. I put a hand to my hatchet and gave him my face. He flashed his teeth like a baffled wolf, scowled and turned back toward the house from the yard of which he had appeared.

Yet that was our closest contact with any of the raiders before we reached the church and made our way inside. Already many of the converts were there with the two Moravian teachers, and others came in quickly after we had arrived.

We piled our bundles, left Little Duck to watch them and I led Metta to a window from which we could watch the scene. Side by side we gazed out on the storm of destruction, spread over the peaceful town. Several additional houses were burning now. An odor of burning-wood smoke drifted to our nostrils as we stood. The shouts and whoops of the tribesmen came shrilly to our ears. Now and then a gun was fired, but whether with murderous intent or not, we could not then know.

I SWEPT my eyes far and wide. Already the smoke cloud was throwing a veiling pall between the village and the light of the sun. I turned my glance from the outer world to the woman at my side. And I saw her brown eyes moist and brimming with tears. But I said no word, since I found naught worth while to say. Merely I took her hand into mine unresisting, and held it firmly fast.

A few of the converts were still coming in, many of them entirely empty-handed, having been driven from their cabins with no chance of saving a belonging, or robbed of what they had saved as they fled to the shelter of the church. They clustered in mournful groups about the room and spoke in lowered tones concerning what was taking place, with shaking heads, concerning what things the future might hold.

Among them Zeisberger and Heckwelder passed from group to group, speaking such words of comfort as they might. The smell of their burning cabins came into the place. Smoke drifted about it from window and door. Shots, yells and ribald shouting filled the streets with a savage carnival of sound. By noon, Gnadenhütten was a half-burned ruin, its homes deserted by their dwellers, swept clean of practically everything of value; the noise of pillage was dying down, and the looters were drifting slowly back to camp. Having deposited their stolen plunder there, the majority of the tribesmen ran off down the river and repeated the scene of the morning at Salem, which was also partly burned.

But in neither place, thanks to the commands of Pomoacan and Pipe, was there any loss of life. Nor were the churches molested from first to last. They became the refuge of the converts and were packed full with such belongings as they had been able to preserve.

Still in both towns, where peaceful plenty had reigned that morning, nothing remained

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that night save smoking ruins and partial want, monuments both to the savage revenge, which blazed in the heart of Elliott and thus found expression in deeds. And as Nashoba had said, the sun sank red that night through the smoke of burning homes.

And not until the sun was sinking did I leave the church and make my way back to the camp, to find it piled high with loot and well-nigh deserted, most of the men being down the river at Salem, as I have said.

Yet I found Nashoba and Sheshequins cooking beside a fire in our own place. Elliott's tent had been set up as I could see, and I asked if the white were within it, since I saw several of the Shawnees not far from its backturned fly.

Nashoba spat on the ground, as he replied that he was.

"Can you not smell the stench of his lair, little brother?" he went on. "This agent hath the scent of a stinking wolverine. See how the Shawnee dogs cluster about the mouth of his burrow. Savage, they may be—red savages, as the white men call us. Yet while I call not the Shawnee brother, my heart lifts a song to Welsheetmonet Himself, that I was not born with a white skin—to be one such as he."

"Aye," said I, "yet am I white, Nashoba, and I can not find it in my heart to think of deeds such as his. Wherefore I consider that there be good and bad men among all races, even as these white teachers are good men, wherefore Elliott hates them in his heart."

Nashoba turned toward me. His arm went about my shoulders.

"Aye," he said softly. "I spoke too quickly, White Wolf. You are my brother and I know. The maid is safe?"

"Aye," I responded to his words and action. "She lies in the church with the company of these people who will now at least take their leaders with them when they are removed."

"On that both Pipe and Pomoacan are agreed," Sheshequins spoke. "So shall the Wyandot keep his pledge to regard them as his fathers and keep them from harm."

Night fell while we conversed. Men came in bands from Salem, bringing fresh loot. They lighted fires and began their cooking. The camp became full of an unwonted confusion, of shouting, and bantering greetings as this band or that returned. Groups formed and blankets were spread, and gambling began, one group pitting its skill and its loot against that of another. Rather than dying down, the fires were built higher. Here and there an improvised rattle began beating the time of a dance.

The night became rapidly one of celebration for the orgy of looting through the day. Warriors grotesquely garbed in sundry of their spoils drifted here and there, arousing the laughter of their fellows. Nashoba, Sheshequins and I finished our meal, lighted our pipes and smoked. The whole camp was full of life, light and noise.

Hence there was no reason for me to attach any greater importance to the Shawnee portion, surrounding Elliott's tent, than to any other. Nor do I think, according to the Indian custom, had I any reason to do so, indeed. For though I was white by birth, I had been raised in the Delaware clan, and my thoughts were those of the red man, my heart the red man's heart. Even then I had yet to learn how black could be the heart of the white.

Yet I was to learn, and shortly, as I soon found out. A soft foot sounded close beside our fire. Into its circle of light stepped Red Wing, the Delaware youth who had found and brought back Gray Hawk's pack. I noted that his lips were set, and that his dark eyes flashed as he greeted Sheshequins, his sub chief, and squatted down.

Then he opened his lips and spoke, and I knew how black the heart of a white man could be.

"I have word for your ear, White Wolf," he began.

"Speak," said I. "Nashoba is my brother, and Sheshequins my father. Their ears are mine."

"It concerns the maiden who spoke to you last night at the teachers' house," he began and glanced about as though fearful lest he be heard.

For a moment it seemed to me that my tongue was sticking in my mouth. But I forced myself to speak.

"What of her?" I questioned as he paused.

"This," he replied. "The white agent has forsworn all part of the loot from the towns and directed the Shawnees to divide it among themselves. Wherefore he has sent a party from their number into the town, to the church-house of these people to return therefrom with the maiden to the camp. Her he acclaims his part of the plunder. Even now she lies in his tent."

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CHAPTER XIV

I SPRANG to my feet, while my heart sank in my breast.

"How was this learned?" I cried.

"With his own eyes Red Wing beheld the maid led into this white dog's tent," he made answer. "With his own ears, Red Wing heard what was said."

I questioned him no further, since I knew him loyal to my cause, and that hence his action in coming to tell me of what had occurred was due to friendship alone. Rather I formed quickly a plan, for which the mummers strolling about the camp, fantastically clad in odds and ends of their loot, gave me the notion.

"Will Red Wing lend his aid to White Wolf in this?" I said.

"Let White Wolf speak," he replied.

"Then," I spoke in a lowered voice, "go you about the camp and find me somewhat to change my appearance, that I may seem like one of these young men who stroll between the fires."

"I go," he accepted, rose and vanished, as it seemed, without a sound.

I turned to Nashoba who still sat beside the fire, having spoken no word.

"My brother, will you also help me?" I said.

"What would you attempt?" he asked, no less with his eyes than his lips.

"From my brother," I told him, "this: you know the point where on the first day we spread our blankets here, we tried the fishing in the river. If Gray Wolf will go to the river and find a canoe and bring it to that point, that is all I shall ask."

"It shall be done," he promised. "But White Wolf mistook my meaning. What does he intend?"

"To take the maid out of the white dog's kennel," I gave him my answer. "Or else to strangle the white dog as do the Eries their dogs which are white, to clothe Atensi, their goddess, my brother. What else?"

"To gain access to him as one of these young men who make merry among the fires?" Sheshequins suggested softly.

"Aye," I agreed.

"It is good. Welsheetmonet guard you and the maiden. Whither will you go should you escape?"

"To the town of the good Glickhican, my father," I further explained my plan. "There is no safety for her near this man."

"That, too, is good," Sheshequins gave his approval and turned his attention to his pipe.

Red Wing came back while I fumed inwardly at his slowness. With him he brought the cunningly-cured skin of a panther, its skull hollowed out so that it fitted on the head. I know not where he had found it, but it filled me with delight. Slipping it on so that the pelt covered my back, and the head if I bent over concealed my face, I assured myself that my knife and hatchet were each in their sheaths, and ready for my task.

Telling Nashoba to find me a canoe and have it at the appointed place when I should come, I spoke a final word to my foster-father and left the circle of our fire, walking quickly toward the Shawnee part of the camp, and pausing when I reached its edge.

And there I began to play my part. I dropped on hands and knees, lowered my head so that the pelt of the beast I wore covered me well nigh entirely and crawled boldly toward the nearest fire.

I reached it, and passed with a slinking sort of gait, as nearly an imitation of the crouching crawl of the beast I was supposed to represent as I could compass. My audience was not critical, however, and my appearance was acclaimed with delight. Seeming to give them no heed beyond a deep-throated growl in keeping with my part I kept straight on toward Elliott's tent. One fire, two, a half-dozen I passed without my purpose being suspected, or myself being considered aught but a member of the tribe who was having sport.

Then I had passed the last circle between me and the tent itself. Hastening my pace I covered the final distance quickly and so reached my goal at last.

And there I rose to my feet. The sound of voices came faintly to my ear. I knew them both. One was that of Elliott, the other was that of Metta herself, raised in scornful protest as it seemed to me.

I waited no longer. She was there. Red Wing had told me truly. And suddenly my blood was as fire in my veins at what this white fiend had dared. My hand went out, and as on the night before, laid hold of the fly. I swept it aside, strode past it into the tent, and let it fall again behind my back.

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As I entered Elliott sprang to his feet and stood staring at me and my odd attire. I suppose I must have presented a somewhat remarkable apparition. But his moment's hesitation gave him into my hand, as I had hoped that perchance it would.

One of my hands shot up and whipped my knife from its sheath. In a leap very much like that of the beast I was dressed to represent when it springs upon its prey, I reached him, seized him by the collar of his buckskin shirt and laid my knife to his throat.

"Open your mouth save as White Wolf tells you, and you shall open it no more on this side Biskoonah, where foul Leshi reigns," I said.

"White Wolf!"

The words were a whisper of something like joy in my ears.

"Be silent, Little Stream," I bade her quickly without shifting my gaze from Elliott's eyes.

And in that instant I knew he was given to my hands. The man was afraid. Fear looked into my eyes out of his. Yet even so he attempted to bluster.

"Strip me!" he began, and I tightened my grasp on his collar till he choked. "Let a man do the talking," I growled. "For look you, Elliott, the agent of the father, we speak now as man to man, save that I spit upon you as a dog. Wherefore speak if you will, knowing that my knife will cut the word in two in your stinking throat."

He yielded, as I thought he would, to save his miserable life.

"What do you want?" he asked in a sort of mumble, though he knew the answer quite well.

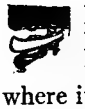
"The maid," I replied, "and your company through the camp of the Shawnees."

I saw once more a gleam of craft in his eyes and went on.

"Think not you can play me false there, for it is dark and I shall walk with my hand upon you, so that should you cry out or make the slightest sign, I shall know and my knife shall find your heart ere any help may reach you, oh agent of the father at Detroit."

He nodded slightly in assent. I signed to Metta, and she rose. We passed out of the tent, into the fire-lit night of the camp, and through it, walking slowly and without any seeming haste. And now and then I let the cool steel of my knife-blade touch the back of Elliott's neck.

So at last we came to the river, and I gave the call of the red bird—a boyhood signal of Nashoba's and mine.



IT WAS answered close at hand. My brother came out of the night to meet me, and led us to the canoe, where it lay drawn up on the bank. I told him to launch it and help the maid aboard. Then I drew knife and pistol from Elliott's belt, hurled them into the bushes, released my hold upon him and stepped into the canoe.

With a shout, Elliott started back toward the camp.

"His Shawnees will overtake you," Nashoba said, as I picked up a paddle.

"Nay," I rejoined, "the canoe is but a blind. I shall see you again, my brother. Now farewell."

I dug my blade deep into the night-darkened water, and drove the canoe from the shore.

And for some little time I continued to paddle as swiftly as I knew how, with the current to aid me. Then with a bend of the river between us and the camp, I spoke to the maid.

"Little Stream, can you swim?"

"Aye, White Wolf," she said.

"Do you trust White Wolf?" I asked her further.

"Aye—with my life, with my honor," she made answer so quickly that my heart leaped in my breast.

"To save both will you do as he says?"

"Aye."

"Then remove your garments and tie them securely together. Arrange your girdle to form a loop you may slip about your neck. When you have done so speak."

I laid down my paddle, slipped out of shirt and leggings, rolled them into a bundle about my knife and hatchet and tied them between my shoulders by means of some of the thrums which I cut off and knotted to form a slender cord.

"I have done as White Wolf directed," I heard Metta's voice.

"Slip over the side," I told her; "and swim straight toward the farther bank."

I felt her slender body go over into the water, while I steadied the canoe. I followed at once myself, The canoe released, floated off upon the current, as I had intended it should. I had said to Nashoba

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that I meant it for a blind. Knowing we had made away in it, the Shawnees would, I hoped, spend some time in looking for it. When found it would of course be empty, but even so they would have no way of knowing where we had left it and would so be compelled to fling far and wide their search. Now as it vanished down the river, I turned and swam for the shore.

Presently I put down my feet, felt for the bottom and found it and stood up in the stream.

"Metta," I called very softly. "Metta."

"Here," she answered, close at hand, and a moment later I stood beside her there in the Tuscarawas flood.

"Place your hand on my shoulder," I said. "So shall we keep close together as we swim."

"Whither are we going?" she questioned in a whisper.

"To Salem. To the good Glickhican," I said, and heard her catch a breath of what sounded to me then like relief.

"Come," I urged.

Her hand fell fumbling in the darkness against me. I lifted it to my shoulder and raised my feet. Swimming on my breast, I started down the dark course of the river with her at my side. But ever as I went, not too far from the bank to reach it quickly, I was straining my ears for the dip of unseen paddles, which I knew must come before we had covered thus the some six miles between us and Salem if one allowed for the Tuscarawas' many twists and turns.

And after a time I heard it, coming nearer and nearer, and swinging swam in to the bank where it seemed the highest, and the shadows darkest and put down my feet again, and helped the maid to stand with the water up to her chin.

The canoes came on and passed as the sound of the paddles told me. They were driving fast. I let a grim smile cross my lips as the tell-tale sound of their going died down the river. Then as silently as an otter, I once more began to swim.

As good fortune would have it, the water was still warm at that time of the year, else the thing could hardly have been done. But in those sections the weather was still hot in early September, and both Metta and I were children of the open with swift, young blood, which defied what coldness might have chilled the life of those less accustomed to temperature changes. Once indeed as we swam side by side I asked her if she were cold. And she answered me "no" in a tone of almost laughter, despite the position in which we found ourselves this night.

My heart swelled at her spirit, told me she was a woman any man, be he red or white, might well be proud to win. And she was mine, had told me she trusted me wholly, back there before we had set the canoe adrift.

"You are one of strong heart, Little Stream," I whispered. "Thy heart is not chilled by cold nor yet by fear."

The hand on my shoulder tightened.

"Are you not with me?" she questioned simply. "Think you I would swim like this by the side of any other man?"

"Nay," I said, and meant it, and swam on, straining both ears and eyes.

For now I knew that the canoes could not be far ahead. They had caught us up too quickly for our canoe to have drifted far before it was found. Elliott had surely lost no time in putting his men on our track. I began to exercise a greater caution as we advanced, pausing and sighting low along the surface of the water before I ventured to cross any part of the stream where some open place in the forest let the shimmer of the stars disperse the shadows and set the surface ashine.

KNOWING the mind of the red man as I did, I gave myself credit for no greater shrewdness than the Shawnees possessed. I knew that when the canoe was found they would understand, and at once begin beating both banks back toward Gnadenhütten. Hence any open space along the river would be watched. And even so I hoped to trick them, which was why I had not waited longer after the pursuing canoes had passed.

Indeed I desired to be so close as I might to the spot where they found our abandoned craft. My hope was to slip past that point so soon as they took to their search on land, and so float on down the river, while they spent the night in a futile search through the forest at our backs.

Hence I went more and more slowly, stopping now and then to stand and listen not only for sounds from the stream before us, but from the forest as well.

And it was so in the end that the sound

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of muffled guttural voices same to me at last. I caught Metta's fingers in mine and pressed them for silence and stood waiting with every nerve tense. For a moment nothing else. Then again speech, and after that the dip of paddles, and silence again.

But I understood those signs. They had found the canoe, and had sent their own in to the shore. I glanced about. What I needed now was a place of temporary shelter. And by now my eyes had grown so accustomed to the night that I saw more clearly.

A short distance ahead was a bank, where low-growing bushes hung down, almost dipping their branches in the water. It was one of those undercut parts of the bank I fancied such as existed here and there along the stream. Letting myself go free with the current once more, and careful not to break the surface by so much as a finger as I moved my arms, I made toward it as silently as a mink might have done.

And having reached it I found what I hoped, parted the branches softly, and led my maid in beside me, so that we crouched on our knees with a roof of crumbling, damp soil above our heads and a screen of the drooping bushes before us as we knelt.

Yet oddly enough I could hear very well. The earth wall at our backs and above our heads seemed in some way to catch every little echo of life in the forest. I even caught after a time the soft sound of a footfall as some Shawnee, I did not doubt, pushed his way along the bank. Also there came the dip of a paddle from the river in front. Plainly they had thought of the very thing I was doing and rather than having put all their men ashore, were patrolling the river backward on the chance of catching me unawares.

Unexpectedly a man spoke from what seemed directly overhead. I think now he must have been standing among the bushes which fringed our overhanging bank.

"The White Wolf is a fox, my brother," he declared. "Yet leaves he no scent on the trail."

And unexpectedly he who must have been his companion, replied—

"He is a man, be he Delaware or white. It has come to my ears the maid was promised to him both by the teachers and his captain. Wherefore my heart says, let him keep her if he may."

"Aye," said the first speaker. "Our brother Elliott has permitted his rage to override his judgment. Come."

They moved off. Their footfalls died away. Their remarks had somewhat surprised me, and I made no move, half-fearing a trick; that they had known I was crouching there beneath them, and had hoped to lure me into too sudden an appearance. Yet after a time, no further sound reaching my ears, I did slip softly forth, leading Metta by the hand, and we once more gave ourselves to the current, letting it sweep us slowly down-stream with no more than our nostrils above the surface, as we moved.

So for perhaps the half of an hour we floated, I being not certain that the Shawnees might not have sent a canoe still further down the river, so that it might intercept us unless we were keenly alert. Yet now I think that they did not do so, since we saw no sign of any such action on their part. And after that first hour, I turned and once more swam, putting all the power I could into my stroke and making good time.

For what I judged must have been an hour I swam and floated. Then once more I sought for a sheltered spot along the bank. And after a time I found it—a strip of high bank, with a tiny, grass-grown shore-line before it, and alder bushes drooping over the upper lip.

I drew myself out of the stream, and gave Metta my hand. The Fall-dried grass rustled slightly beneath our feet. We stretched ourselves out upon it and lay there, like two veritable creatures of the wild as we waited for the first faint light of dawn, ready at need to slip back into the stream.

I mounted guard beside her, resting on my belly, eyes and ears open. But we did not speak. Hours passed and left my lids heavy, but I kept them open still. There was no sound or movement from the girl beside me, save the soft sighing of her breath, and I fancied she slept. So the night passed.

And at length a grayness crept into the air. Then and then only I turned my head. I had been right. She lay there locked in slumber with her water-soaked bundle of clothing tied fast to her back. I put out a hand and touched her gently on the

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silken skin of her shoulder, and she stirred, lifted her head, met my glance and flushed from her eyes to her breast.

"Dress yourself quickly," I said in a whisper, and turned my back while I tore off my own roll of leggings and shirt, and donned them so swiftly as I might.

I turned to find Metta clothed and took her hand in mine. We climbed the bank and turned our faces down-stream in the ghostly light which was creeping through the forest to harbinger the day.

She came with me like a child. A bird waked above us and twittered in almost sleepy fashion as we passed beneath its perch. We made our way as quickly as we might, beginning to watch now for signs of the town we intended to gain.

Full half an hour passed as we hastened onward, her hand in mine. A dog barked without warning off to the right. I turned my head toward the sound. A scent of wood smoke struck into my nostrils. With my maid at my side I moved off in the direction where the dog still barked.

And then abruptly the forest fell away and gave upon fields. We broke through the last screen of bushes. The half-burned town of Salem lay before us in the light of the new day.

CHAPTER XV

WE WENT toward it quickly, reassured by the air of quiet which hung above it despite the burned cabins here and there. Threads of smoke were rising from certain of the other cabins, and there was no sign of excitement in the place.

We came into the end of its street and so upon a Moravian convert, at sight of whom Metta cried out. She knew him as it chanced and at sound of her voice he turned toward us, stared as he beheld her and then advanced.

We explained briefly the reason for our coming, and he shook his head.

"My sister knows the house of Glickhican," he said. "Those others did it no harm when they came upon us to pilfer what they might. Tell me, is it true as they said, that the council has decreed that we be removed?"

"Aye," I gave him answer. "But your teachers go with you on the trail. So has Pomoacan the Wyandot spoken."

He nodded slightly.

"So it was said. Your words are good in my ear."

We left him and went on down the street toward a cabin, Metta now taking the lead. We turned in at its gate and approached its door, which stood open.

And there we came upon Glickhican, the former war lord of the Delawares.

His face was stern as we told our story, yet softened somewhat as we reached the end of our tale. He was a man who knew the human heart and had not forgotten the code of the tribes, when he laid the hatchet aside and opened his heart to the teachings of that softer code, which in the end he embraced.

"White Wolf has proven himself a man," he said, after I had described my rescue of the maiden from Elliott's tent. "He has proven his wisdom in coming to Glickhican. Here he shall lie safely with her as Glickhican's guests. It appears that the Great Father has brought your four feet into the same path along strange trails. Nor, I think, shall this white agent again attempt to interfere. Now must you eat and rest, since you must be weary after the night you have passed."

And to tell the truth we were, so that we made short work of the food he presently had set before us, and lost no time in stretching ourselves on the shelves at the side of his cabin. Myself I think I had barely stretched out before I was asleep.

Nor did I awaken until Glickhican roused me and bade me get up. His face was stern once more as I noted and he spoke in a tone of haste.

"White Wolf, my son, one of our people has run to inform me that a party of armed men have come out of the forest from the direction of Gnadenhütten and are approaching the town. Whether they come as friends or foemen does not as yet appear. But it were safer for you and the maiden to remain under cover while they be here. And there is a place."

He turned and pointed to a small section of the floor which I saw he had removed and laid to one side, leaving a dark, square opening leading plainly to some sort of place beneath the cabin. And I saw also that Metta was already awake and seated on the shelf on the other side of the house.

"Take your blankets my children and creep below, that I may shut you in,"

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Glickhican went on. "Yonder is the place where in Winter I have kept the roots and herbs from my garden ready to my hand. Lie there in safety until the mission of these men is known."

Without demur I rose, took blankets he provided and dropped through the hole in the floor. I spread the blankets in the dark, root-scented hole I had entered, put up my hands and received the form of the maid as Glickhican lowered her into my arms. A moment later what light entered our hiding-place was shut out as the Delaware reset the trap-door-like section of the floor in its usual position. A little dust sifted down as I heard him wielding a birch twig broom to cover any marks on the floor, that our still-damp moccasins might have made.

Thereafter followed one of the most inexplicable parts of the whole red Acadia from first to last and one I have never understood. For as events transpired it seemed that the men of whom Glickhican had been warned in time to hide us had come for the Delaware himself.

Pipe sent them to arrest Glickhican and bring him back to Gnadenhütten, Heaven knows why, unless our captain feared that like those others of the peace party who had fled for refuge against him to Pittsburg, the great man of the tribe might seek to make an escape. If that were it, Pipe surely proved himself a poor judge of the character of the man, and failed again as he had done from first to last to read aright his heart.

Nor do I think that until the day of his hideous death at the hands of a band of prowling white dogs, who posed as organized militia, did our party of our clan ever appreciate the true nature of that red martyr who had taken the name of Isaac when he bowed his soul to Christ, and like Isaac became so nearly, was led in the end, a human sacrifice to the blood lust of evil hearts.

Certain I am that the party who came to lead him to Gnadenhütten did not even faintly know the man. They feared him—thought of him as that Glickhican whose name had once been synonymous among our people for warlike prowess and might. That I know because from my place beneath his floor, with my loved one crouched, warm and tense beside me, I heard what transpired.

They had come to arrest him and lead him back a prisoner to Pipe. Yet once before his house, they held back and sent forward one of their number to approach his door.

And he it was who gave to Glickhican, the orders of Pipe.

And to him Glickhican replied:

"Since ye are sent to take me, my brother of the Delawares, why is it that your men stand without my gate? Do ye hesitate to fulfil the orders of your leader?"

"We question in our hearts whether we come to arrest Glickhican of the Delawares, who was once a chief whose name the women used to send their children to sleep, or that Isaac, who has broken his vow, and buried his hatchet, because of these white-faced teacher, whose words have entered his heart."

"You fear me, my brothers?"

To me it seemed that a great—a heart-swelling sorrow rang in Glickhican's words.

"Who in the past did not fear him who was Glickhican?" I heard the other reply.

"Then lead in your men," the one who had hidden us told him, "since this is Isaac and not that Glickhican whose fear could fill men's hearts. Wherefore Isaac bows his head to the commands of your Captain Pipe, and holds his hands before him that ye may bind them if you will—or should you fear him still as Isaac, who was Glickhican in the past."

Aye, it was a quiet speech from the greatest warrior of us all, who, as I look back now upon it, had become the greatest man. And I am glad to be able to record that once at Gnadenhütten, Pipe took his parole and gave him full freedom of action, without guards or restraint.

But we could not know to what fate he was led as we knelt there and hearkened to the words which drifted to us in our cover. And I felt my maid quiver with the emotions which filled her gentle bosom, and slipped an arm about her, drawing her close beside me, more in a dumb sort of effort at comfort than anything else. And as she lay against me, her cheek brushed mine and I found it wet with tears.

AN HOUR passed in which we neither spoke, nor moved but slightly, ere Metta struggled free of my embrace and sat up.

"What now?" she questioned softly. "What now, White Wolf?"

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"We may return to the cabin, I think," I replied, since I had been asking myself the same question her lips had framed. "We know now the mission on which the party came, though I do not understand the cause."

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," she said, and suddenly she sobbed. "White Wolf—I weep—for that strong, good man."

"Aye," I replied; "weep and I weep with you, since a sagamore is fallen, gentle maiden. Yet to my mind to chasten one beloved is a most poor way of showing love. Come, shall we ascend?"

I rose and found my head beneath the movable portion of the floor. Lifting my arms I raised it and let it fall back. Then still careful and on my guard, I crept up, knelt and reached down my hands until Metta seized them, and so swung her up to the room which was empty of all save ourselves.

And suddenly she turned to me a rosy face wherein the red blood set its mark of crimson.

"White Wolf," she cried, "he will tell the good Heckwelder we are here, and he will know. Last night he wept like one bereft of a child when the Shawnees led me from the church. But now his heart will be glad that a man has saved me from death."

"Thou wouldst have died then?" I questioned.

She lifted her eyes as I rose and stood above her.

"Died? Aye—what else? I am not sure, but—another had died—as well."

"Thou shalt not kill," I said in a bantering fashion, since despite all else that morning, my heart was glad.

But she shook her head as she made answer.

"Aye—that I know; yet think you not that God would forgive even that to a maid should one seek to unfasten her girdle, White Wolf?"

"Aye," I said, putting down my hands to raise her. "I think he would forgive."

And suddenly her red lips quivered.

"But now I have no marriage dress, White Wolf," she cried.

And I smiled into her eyes.

"What matter. The God who has brought us together, thinks naught of how we are clothed."

Yet she made me sit down while she told me of the garment she had fashioned like other Indian maidens and laid away with sweet leaves against the day of her mating; speaking of its softness, its bead-wrought girdle, the quill work on skirt and bodice, each bit of which her own fingers had placed. And I sat and let her run on until she was quite finished, after which I told her how Sheshequins had compared us to the Secret Children in our love.

And that done we rose and I went to the door looking out to make certain that the party had left with the man they had come to take. Finding the way clear, I signed Metta to follow and we left the house. Nor was it long until we found plenty of the converts to listen to our story and the tale of what had occurred at Gnadenhütten the day before or with whom to discuss what was yet to come.

Myself as a Delaware must needs answer many a question as to why Glickhican had been taken away, yet could not do so, not knowing. I could however regale the men with the story of the clash between Pomoacan and Elliott on the morning before, and did so, smoking a pipe and chatting with them, while Metta went with the women to gossip in similar fashion no doubt.

Noon came and brought some of Pomoacan's men as it were to confirm my words. They came, gaunt, bronzed warriors, picked men as it seemed to me then, carrying their rifles, hatchets and knives, saying gruffly no more than that the men of Salem were to prepare for the trail, and until the start was ordered, should devote their time to preparation by getting ready such belongings and provisions as had been left them in yesterday's raid on the town.

Having delivered their message, they passed, grimly stalking, down the street, and made themselves a camp at its end. And thither I went after a time, since I had recognized one of their men, Big Otter, a trusted tribesman of the Wyandot half-king.

Desiring information of what was transpiring up the river, I sought him out and asked what was going on.

He shrugged.

"The praying people are mending their boats to transport the aged, and the women with suckling children at their breasts, oh, Delaware," he replied; "also the sick of which there are a few, by water so far as

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they may. Pomoacan has decreed that the removal shall not take place for some days, since it appears there must be some preparation made before it begins. Wherefore those not at work on the boats employ their time in gathering together such of their belongings as yet remain, such provisions as they may obtain from their fields and such of their cattle as were not slain for the feast at the camp last night."

"Then we move not for some days, Big Otter?" I said.

"Nay," he agreed.

"And what of the agent of the father?" I inquired.

Once more he shrugged, yet allowed a grim smile to stretch his lips.

"Having surrendered the command to Pomoacan, he sits in his tent," he made answer, "while his dogs slink back scentless from a trail which is cold."

I knew very well he referred to my escape with Metta the night before, and told him the tale.

He heard me out in silence, but smiled again at the last and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"White Wolf you are by name, and white you are by birth, as I know," he declared. "Yet should you at any time need a friend or a refuge, the lodge of Big Otter and his people stands an open road before your feet."

"Think you," said I, touched by his words, "that the father's agent will seek for the maiden here?"

"Nay," said he; "take no trouble over that. The white agent has shot his arrow, and has broken the strand of his bow. More than one word is needed to send the Wyandots running like children to their mother, as by now he knows. Our party remains here, oh, White Wolf, and none enters or leaves the town without our permission or knowledge. Such is Pomoacan's word."

I rose and left him immensely relieved, for though I had faith in Glickhican's word, yet since he had been taken away I had been somewhat disturbed lest Elliott failing to overtake us during the night should send his Shawnees here on the chance that we might have taken refuge at the lower Moravian town. Now however I felt he would scarcely dare to bring about a clash between his men and those of the Wyandot leader. Hence I thanked Big Otter for his assurance, and went in search of Metta to tell her what I had learned.

FOLLOWED six days during which both at Gnadenhütten and at Salem, the converts prepared for the exodus to come. Such personal belongings as still remained in their hands were tied into packs. Such food as they had or could procure was prepared for the journey before them of how long duration or to what destination, not one of them knew. Nor did I myself for the matter of that. Not once had I heard mention of their final disposition made. Once in council as I have set down Elliott had spoken of provisions being made for their accommodation. But even then he had not said what those provisions might be.

Once during the time of preparation Nashoba came down the river and sought me out. According to him Elliott was cursing each new morning of delay. And I confess that it struck me as odd that the very reason which the Moravian converts themselves had raised at first in the council as an argument against their immediate removal should be given now as the excuse for holding that removal back.

It seemed almost an irony of fate to urge the need of gathering food, after the pillage of their towns, in which most of their supplies had been destroyed, though in justice I must once more emphasize the fact that the wild third day of September was Captain Elliott's work.

Nashoba told me also that the converts at Gnadenhütten had been commanded to gather at Salem so soon as they were ready for the trail. Also I learned that Glickhican had been given his freedom in exchange for his parole and would come down the river with the last of the converts to leave the upper town.

"He has spoken with the younger of the two white teachers concerning you and the maid," he declared.

"Aye," said I. "How know you that, my brother?"

"Through the teacher himself," he replied. "Intending to come hither to learn how you fared, I went boldly to see him and told him somewhat of the other night. He told me in turn that Glickhican had informed him you both were here, which made my heart glad."

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I put my arm about his shoulders.

"Thou art my brother," I said.

"Who am about to lose a brother," he returned, so that I suddenly felt that I knew why his air had been more or less one of sorrow since first he had found me after he entered the town.

"What mean you?" I questioned him quickly. "Say you we shall no more be brothers, Gray Wolf?"

"Nay—not that," he returned. "Yet in my talk with this white teacher, he opened to me his heart concerning thee and the maid. He is minded that so soon as he comes to Salem, you two must be wed, according to the white man's law, and that after that you must take boat down the Muskingum to the white man's town of Marietta, going back to your own people, rather than continuing with us."

His words gave me a pang, and yet my heart leaped.

"Do you remember the words of Sheshequins, oh, big brother?" I asked. "Even so he said that the Secret Children, when they were of age, and had come pure to their mating, went back to their own people, to carry them clean blood."

"Oh, aye," Nashoba made answer. "Yet have we loved you little brother, and it will not seem the same without you in our house."

He put his arm about me, even as I had placed mine about him, and for some time we sat there in silence, ere he rose and stalked out of the town.

The next day saw the first of the converts from Gnadenhütten dropping down the river or making their way through the forest and camping about the town. More and more they came throughout that day and the next, and the one after that.

On the second Metta found her foster-parents, Big Owl and Little Duck, among them, and slept that night beside them and what few belongings they had brought.

And on the fourth day, the tenth of September, came the last of the men from the upper village bringing with them Zeisberger, Heckwelder and Glickhican and followed by the Delawares, the Wyandots, the Ottawas and Shawnees with Captain Elliott.

That night the church bell tolled for the last time in Salem, calling the converts to the meeting for the last time in the town. They answered the call from cabin and camp, leaving their packs each at their place and streaming down the streets toward the soft-toned call of the bell.

Metta and I went with them. We had seen Heckwelder that afternoon, and it was then he had given me my name of Asher Wolf, and though my maiden's marriage-garment was now a thing of the past, yet this was our wedding night. None knew it, I think, save the two white teachers, myself and Nashoba and Sheshequins of course, Metta and her foster-parents. But Heckwelder wanted it so.

He desired that we be married in the sight of all the people and such of the men of the other tribes as might choose to come to the church. Thus he felt we would be man and wife in the sight of all, and reasoned that even if so minded, Elliott would hesitate to make any move during the coming night, in which he would be near the town. After the ceremony we had agreed that the two whites, the maid and myself should lodge in Glickhican's house to which the teachers had already gone with the former Delaware chief.

And so it was done. The church was packed. Men, women and children filled it and stood about windows and doors. Zeisberger prayed for strength in the face of this new, fresh trial, for strength of heart and limb upon the journey with which his people were faced. Heckwelder spoke words of encouragement and counsel. The people sang.

Their voices, lifted, blended, rose in a vast chorus of simple hearts, facing grief, want, deprivation. The bass of their voices was like the low, deep, soughing of a wind within the forest; the higher notes as sweetly plaintive as a tense æolian harp with its minor strain. It rose and sank and rose again and died, that last song of the Moravian band in the home they should know no more.

And as it died and Heckwelder signaled to us, Metta and I left our places and advanced to stand before him, ringed about by the National Assistants, Glickhican at their head.

Heckwelder spoke in the Delaware tongue, yet used the service of his church. Its strangely solemn words rang out above the sea of faces, rose above the stilled breathing of the people. Until at the

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last he joined our hands, and pronounced us man and wife.

Thus in that last sad meeting of a harmless people came a great joy into my life, and once back in Glickhican's house, Heckwelder gave me a bit of his talking paper to say that it was so; after which he pressed his lips to Metta's forehead and calling her "my daughter," gave her his blessing before we wrapped our blankets around us and lay down for the night.

CHAPTER XVI

FOLLOWED the Red Acadia, the exodus of the red Christians the next day. They who had done no harm, who had asked only that they be permitted to dwell in peace with all men, to keep their paths open to all nations, to spread the teachings of love in a world of savage impulse, found themselves caught in a whirlwind of wrath between two warring nations, sucked into the maw of revenge and evil plotting, and cast forth from the places of quiet and plenty, their industry had raised.

Like men caught in a blast too strong to resist, the Moravians and their converts bowed their heads, turned their backs and went slowly before the storm of human rage, they might no longer face.

On the morning of the eleventh of September, 1781, they shouldered their few remaining possessions and moved away from the last of their towns, part in boats down the Tuscarawas, and the rest in a long, dark, silent stream across the landscape between troops of the tribal guards.

So the Red Acadia began.

Before leaving Salem, the church-house was fired, by whom I know not, yet by the orders of the teachers, that it might never be used for any other purpose save that one of divine worship for which it had been raised.

As the long line of men, women and children, pack-burdened, driving here and there a few of their remaining cattle, crept across the fields toward the west, it stood a smoking, flame-spurting background in the midst of the deserted town. Walking with Metta and her foster-parents and Nashoba, who had placed himself at my side, I saw many a saddened face turn to watch it in a last, though silent farewell.

And I can picture the whole scene yet if I shut my eyes and call the picture up: men, women, children, homeless, well-nigh destitute even as we red men accounted such things, bearing their all on their backs, trailing in uneven column into the unknown future which faced them, with the men who compelled them thus blindly forward, hovering on their flanks to spur their advance.

Yet despite the deep agony of so many hearts, the whole thing passed without any excitement worthy of the name. The converts were after all red men, trained to support emotion with little visible sign. Beyond here and there a tear-dimmed eye or a child's streaked face, there was little to hint the fact that these were persecuted people, driven forth from the homes they had reared in trust and brotherly love, to a cruel and unkind fate.

What they felt they kept to themselves as they fared into the west at the white man's behest. Inside an hour after dawn the thing was accomplished and naught remained of the Christian settlements along the Tuscarawas save the abandoned towns and the dark line of bent and burdened figures, moving down the peaceful valley, and the laden canoes on the stream.

Of Elliott I saw little. He kept himself well at the head of the column with Pipe and some of the sub chiefs of the Shawnees. But I have heard that from that time on he played but a secondary part in the expedition, finding himself outnumbered too completely by the Delawares and the Wyandots in whom he had raised so hot a resentment by his threat of vengeance in the council that last day it met. He contented himself perforce in playing the part for which in the first place Pomoacan had asked that he come with us and left the rest of the matter to Pipe and the Wyandot half-king.

Nor is there aught to record of that day, as we marched down the Tuscarawas Valley. Nashoba stuck to my side. It was our intent to camp that night at our town of Goschocking—now Coshocton, Ohio—at the junction of the Tuscarawas and Walhonding, some fourteen miles in a straight line from Salem, and from there to turn north along the Walhonding to the site of Pipe's former town.

But at Goschocking it was planned for Metta and me to take canoe and go down

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the Muskingum to Marietta, and so back to that race from which we were sprung, and I knew that my foster-brother walked beside me this last day on which we would be together so far as either knew.

Yet we spoke little together until we reached the Delaware town late in the afternoon, and made our camp. Then, speaking of obtaining a canoe for our use, Nashoba disappeared.

Night came down with the exiles building fires and huddling into family groups about them, until at length one of the National Assistants passed among us with a rattle, summoning all to a meeting in the open air.

That scene too stands out in my recollection. I can see the white-headed Zeisberger yet, as he raised his hands and called his people to prayer. I can see Heckwelder standing among them as they gathered about him on the ground, speaking words of counsel and comfort out of his own weary heart, urging them still to lift up their hearts to their God and be not downcast at this turn of fate, but go steadfastly toward their unknown future in faith and unfaltering trust.

I have read since then the story of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness of the East. And always that service held on that night at Goschocking stands out in my mind as in some ways a parallel, and I like to think of Heckwelder as another Moses, speaking good words of counsel and guidance to his people as they sat at his feet and turned their dusky faces to his voice. And, too, I recall the weird effect on my mind of the song which followed, while the rattles of the Assistants beat time.

Indian songs were always things of minors, but that night it struck me as doubly mournful as the blended voices rose and fell, in time to the beat of the rattles, in that first camp beyond their fields of plenty about their abandoned homes. Nor was I alone in the feeling, since beside me, Metta who had been trying to sing with the others, suddenly stopped with a breaking voice and dropped her head on her knees.

Nashoba crept back while we sat.

"All is prepared, little brother," he whispered in my ear.

"It is well." I gave my simple acceptance and spoke to the girl by my side.

We waited until the service was ended, and then sought the teachers out. And from there we sought Sheshequins and to him I made my farewells, sending word to Mowaequa, my foster-mother, and to little Rosebud, whom as a child I had rocked on her cradle board, held in my boyish arms.

Sheshequins laid his hand on my shoulder and looked into my eyes.

"Welsheetmonet, guard you and the woman you have taken into your heart, oh, little white son," he said, and turned away to hide the emotion I had sensed in his quavering voice.

And I am glad to think that at the last as at the first, he called me "little white son."

"Welsheetmonet keep ye, my father," I made him answer, and turned away with Metta and Nashoba at my side.

Nashoba led us to the river, where he brought us to a canoe stocked with such provisions as he had been able to gather, and a rifle and some ammunition. And at the last he pressed into my hands one of the fish-hooks and lines from his pack.

I helped Metta aboard. And then I turned and put out my hand.

"My brother of the blood," I said with an ache in my throat; "farewell."

He caught my hand and held it. His lips were set tight together as we stood there. And then they parted slowly.

"Farewell, oh, little brother," he replied.

I entered the boat, picked up my paddle and thrust it into the stream. The last rays of the setting sun were red upon the water as I drove our craft into the current. They shone on the bronze body of my life-long playmate and companion as he stood upon the shore.

He stood there still, when after some time I glanced back, across the Muskingum's flood. He saw my turned face and lifted his arm, in the sweep of a parting salute. He was my brother, as I had said, and I loved him, but the lure of the sweet, pure woman I had found was greater still. So I swung my blade up in a gesture of final farewell and turned with a smile—to her.

THE END

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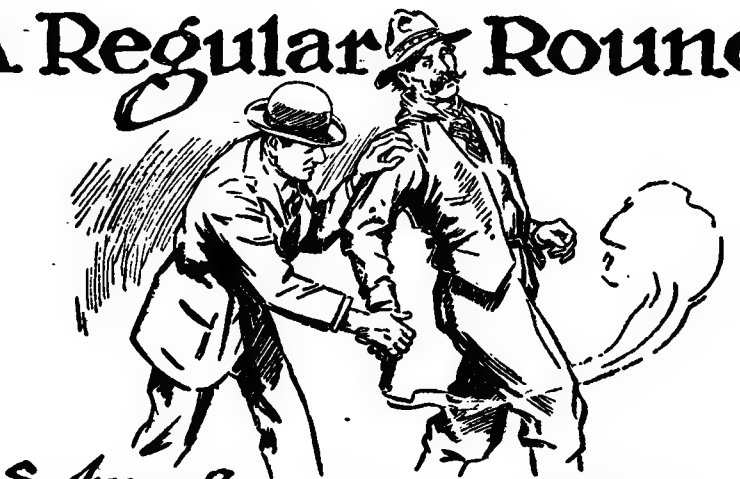
A Regular Rounder



by Russell A. Boggs

Author of "Blaming It on Benny," "Rule G," etc.

AFTER reaching his office in the morning the first act of Mr. Arthur V. Burford, Superintendent of the Western Division of the D. & P. Railroad, was, invariably, to push the button that summoned his chief clerk. But on a certain morning in late July the superintendent had no more than seated himself at his desk when the door of his private office opened and the chief clerk entered. When his assistant appeared thus—without waiting for the usual summons—Burford always knew there was something important on.

The chief clerk's face was habitually worn looking, like the face of one forever confronted by new troubles. But this morning his countenance seemed more care-worn than usual; his eyes sought Burford anxiously.

"Good morning," said the chief clerk, advancing to the superintendent's desk. "Here's a wire that came in just a few minutes ago. I thought you ought to see it, first thing."

Superintendent Burford returned the greeting and bent over the message. He read:

Star City, July 26.

SUPT. BURFORD:

Agent Hepler in jail. Details by letter on No. 171. Please send another man quick.

C. D. DRAPER,
Cashier.

"For the love of Peter!" said Burford, looking up. "What do you suppose has happened?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," replied the chief clerk. "It's a wonder Draper wouldn't have given us a hint in his message. I thought of wiring him for more particulars; but 171 will be in in about ten minutes, so I decided it would be best to wait and see what he says."

"Yes, we'll wait," agreed Burford. "That'll be best."

STAR CITY was hitting the high spots—hitting them with joyousness and abandon.

Oil did it—oil and the Western spirit. Combined, these two elements served to raise Star City from the level of an ordinary cow-and-mining-town of some few hundreds to heights where it became a bustling metropolis of some few thousands.

All this change had come about within a year. Twelve months since some enterprising local capitalists had discovered what they believed were signs of oil. So they drilled a well, and it came in good. They drilled themselves another, and it came in better.

The news got out; spread over the country. A few footloose oil men arrived with well-drilling outfits, coming from other oil fields; they took up some leases and began to drill.

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The first of these wells that the newcomers drilled, north of town, hit the pay sand and gushed forth at the rate of five hundred barrels per day. The next one, west of town, was good for three hundred barrels; and, two days later, a well, south of town, came in, good for a thousand barrels per day.

That settled it; the lid came off. Men simply flocked into Star City—big men and little men. Came a former cabinet officer; two United States senators, one ex and one still in; a dozen congressmen, about equally divided between exs and ins; the president of one of the country's biggest trunk-lines, his shining brass-railed car being set off on the siding back of Star City's D. & P. depot; professional oil capitalists; professional promoters. Oil well supplies poured into town, coming in over the D. & P. And with the oil well paraphernalia came many skilled workmen: drillers, tool-dressers, rig-builders.

To make a long matter short—prosperity hit Star City, a prosperity undreamed of even in the optimistic days of its pristine youth. Buildings shot up like mushrooms, streets grew long and many. To find lodgings became a frenzied undertaking; Star City pointed with pride to new apartment houses wherein families dwelt on the upper floors while yet the lower floor and basement was an unfinished smear of stone, tile, lumber, lath and mortar.

The naturally sandy streets of the town were ground up into deep pits of dust by the unceasing traffic. The slightest breeze filled the air with the choking, blinding particles.

"Pave 'em!" cried Star City, reckless with bulging pockets. "Do it now!"

And without delay they began to add to the clamor and confusion by digging up the streets, grading them, and placing brick thereon.

"Do it now!" became the Star City slogan.

So they added a water works and a sewer system and began to talk of laying out a park.

Wolf Creek was envious. Back in the year when the D. & P. came through, Wolf Creek and Star City had been much alike—small towns in a big country. Wolf Creek had advanced reasons to show why the D. & P. should come through there. Star City did likewise—and won out. Wherefore Wolf Creek had never forgiven its rival—nor the D. & P.

Moreover, when Star City came into its unprecedented prosperity Wolf Creek's envy grew deeper; and some of its loyal citizens set about drilling a test well near their own town. But the well turned out to be a duster—to Wolf Creek's unspeakable chagrin. This was all that was needed: Wolf Creek took Star City's fatness and their own leanness as a personal affront. Wolf Creek's thoughts grew bitter; oil became a forbidden topic within the town limits.

Nevertheless, Wolf Creek was curious. Consequently its citizens took to riding over to Star City, going in bands of a dozen or more. And there, after gazing scornfully at Star City's many activities, they would gather in one of the saloons, usually the Silver Cloud, and lean aggressively over the bar and talk largely, in scathing innuendoes, of what they had seen and of the ruin that was sure to come as the result of any town getting so stuck-up and prideful.

This habit of uttering slighting remarks brought on unfortunate consequences. Star City resented the insinuations and declared that, even if they were growing fat, their trigger-fingers were still limber. There were casualties, several times. And finally, to prevent further damage, Sheriff Lallie issued notice that all visitors, entering Star City, should leave their weapons at his office until departure.

Wolf Creek received this notice with indignation; and, though complying with the edict, took revenge in what became known as a "window-bustin'." This was accomplished by spending, in some bar, the period necessary to get Star City properly worked up; whereupon the whole crowd would disgorge on to the street and there indulge in a free-for-all fight, with no weapons, of a deadly type, allowed. It was a poor week when some of the big windows on Star City's main thoroughfare were not shattered.

It was into a mêlée such as this that Mr. Fred Hepler, agent at Star City for the D. & P., walked one July evening. As Hepler came up the street from his depot and reached a point on the sidewalk directly opposite the Silver Cloud saloon, the door of that dispensary swung outward and a mob from within streamed out at high pressure. Hot words and missiles

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filled the air; and one random brick struck the innocent bystander—Mr. Hepler—a glancing blow on the side of the head.

Mr. Fred had been feeling low in his mind. On the wave of the oil boom Star City station had advanced from a one-man job to a high point where, beside the agent, the station force consisted of a cashier and three clerks. But, notwithstanding the increase in his force, Agent Hepler's duties were aggravatingly overwhelming.

Therefore, when the brick raised a throbbing lump on his head, all the pent-up feelings of months surged into Mr. Hepler's head. He saw red, and from his hip-pocket he flashed forth a pistol. It was a good pistol, one which the agent had felt called upon to carry in order to properly safeguard frequent large express shipments of currency.

Mr. Hepler, his eyes flashing, looked around the howling, fighting mob for the brick-thrower. Directly in front of him he perceived the savage face of one of the Wolf Creek leaders, Lute Kimball.

"Dang your hide!" yelled Freddy. "You will throw a brick at me!"

Raising his pistol he pulled the trigger.

The crack of the gun surprised the belligerents to a temporary halt. They all turned to look at Hepler and the Wolf Creeker.

Lute Kimball wabbled unsteadily on his feet. He stared in a kind of surprise at Hepler.

"You little hell-cat! I didn't throw it!" said Lute; and suddenly sat down, a bullet in his shoulder.

"You didn't? Who did, then?" yelled the aroused Freddy, his head throbbing more painfully as the lump grew bigger.

The Wolf Creekers bestirred themselves to action once more. They surged toward Hepler.

"I did!" yelled one of the foremost.

Freddy raised his pistol again and pressed the trigger. He didn't do so well this time and only hit the second man in the leg; but it brought the fellow down.

Once more the combatants from Wolf Creek paused. Here were two of their men down—and nobody with a gun except the man who had put them out of the fight. More Star City injustice and discrimination!

A tall man came elbowing through the gathering. He caught the agent by the arm.

"Here, Fred!" said Sheriff Lallie. "That's enough! You give me that gun and come along before you get hurt."

Unresisting, Hepler handed his pistol over. The sheriff began to pull him away from the crowd.

The Wolf Creekers let out a yell and started after. The sheriff drew a long gun from his own pocket.

"No you don't!" he said shortly, halting. "I guess you didn't get much more'n you deserved. Now, keep back!"

Long gun in hand, he led the agent away.

The enraged Wolf Creekers shook their fists and yelled—but they didn't follow. And, after some minutes spent in venting their helpless wrath, they gathered up their wounded and carried them into the nearest hotel.

One hour later the unharmed men from Wolf Creek sullenly retrieved their weapons from the sheriff's office and rode off homeward, vowing vengeance against Star City, the D. & P. and the D. & P.'s agent.

IT WAS tidings of this fracas and of Agent Hepler's part in it that came to Superintendent Burford through the arrival of Cashier Draper's letter on No. 171. After relating the facts in connection with Hepler's wounding the two Wolf Creekers and the agent's subsequent lodgment in jail, the cashier had closed with a reference to the Wolf Creekers' threats against the D. & P. and Hepler, stating that Sheriff Lallie had dropped him a hint to be on the lookout for trouble.

Burford and his chief clerk regarded each other soberly after reading the letter.

"Looks bad!" said Burford gravely. "That Wolf Creek crowd is a hard bunch to handle when they get started; and they've always been sore on the D. & P. This thing's liable to start the fireworks."

"Just what I've been thinking," agreed the chief clerk, nodding slowly.

The superintendent sat tapping the edge of the letter on his desk for a few minutes, frowning.

"I don't know," he mused. "I'll have to send a man down there. Let's see." Burford looked at his chief clerk in perplexity. "Have you any one to suggest?" he asked.

The chief clerk also seemed to be in a quandary.

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"I've been trying to think of some one," he answered hesitatingly. "It strikes me that whoever goes'll have to be a lad who doesn't scare at the cars."

He wrinkled his brow for a little bit; and then suddenly his face cleared.

"I know!" he cried. "The very man! Why not send Reilly—our agent down at Globe?"

Burford contemplated his assistant questioningly.

"Why Reilly?" he asked. "Isn't he rather young?"

"Young, yes!" said the chief clerk eagerly. "But he's a regular rounder, despite that! Trainmaster Joice tells me Reilly has all the rough-neck trainmen on the division eating out of his hand. Joice thinks he's some boy."

Burford appeared impressed by his assistant's enthusiastic endorsement. He slapped Cashier Draper's letter on his desk decisively.

"All right!" he announced. "We have to send somebody, and it might as well be Reilly." He glanced at his watch. "Where are all our relief-agents?"

"McCord is out here in the office, doing a little special work for us."

"Tell him to get his things and meet me on No. 122 in fifteen minutes," ordered Burford.

He shoved his chair back and rose to his feet.

"Yes, sir," said the chief clerk.

He moved to the door, paused, and looked inquiringly at the superintendent.

"You're going——"

"To Globe!" said Burford. "I'm going down and have a little talk with Reilly."

II

"As I get it," said Joseph Reilly, the D. & P.'s agent at Globe, "you want me to go up there to Star City and kind of keep an eye on things. Is that it?"

"You've got the idea, exactly!" said Superintendent Burford. "We want a good man; one who's got some brains and is able to act on his own initiative; also, one who's not liable to be shy if the situation develops into a plain question of nerve. So I came down to see you."

Young Joe, seated on the telegraph table in the office of his little depot, grinned and fastened a shrewd, sharp eye on his superintendent.

"I'm much obliged," he said mildly. "And this bunch from Wolf Creek; do you really think they'll try to act up?"

"I don't know," answered Burford. "Maybe they'll not—and then again, maybe they will. They're what can be classified as being a mighty uncertain crowd."

The superintendent felt, somehow, that in picking Reilly a bad choice had not been made.

"And if they start in to raise Cain, I'm to stop 'em?"

"Well, do what you can. Sheriff Lallie will help you, and I'll try and send some of our railroad bulls down to hang around the depot and the right-of-way; there'll not be many of them, though—two or three, maybe."

"Three and myself make four—and the sheriff not counted. Mmmh. How many Wolf Creek citizens did you say?"

"I didn't say; but there'd hardly be less than ten—and perhaps there'd be more; twenty or thirty."

"Ten or twenty or thirty to four or five." Mr. Reilly's keen eyes twinkled at Burford. "All right. When do we go?"

"We'll go up on No. 133. That'll get us into Star City at 3:15 this afternoon. Now go ahead and transfer your accounts to McCord."

LUTE KIMBALL, lying abed in an upper room in one of Star City's hotels, had a visitor: his brother, Kersey.

"How's the shoulder?" asked Kersey.

Lute scowled a little as he tenderly touched his bandages.

"Hurts some," he grunted. "The doc says 'stay in bed a couple days and we'll see.' How's Barbaugh?"

"Oh, his leg's all right. Just a drillin' through the fleshy part. He'll be limpin' 'round soon."

Lute grunted again and his scowl deepened.

"Just to think of that little runt of an agent gettin' us both that way; and not a gun in the crowd!" Lute swore deeply under his breath. "That's these —— railroads for you. They and their men can do anything and get away with it. The company'll stand back of him, see if they don't."

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"They got him in the calaboose," said Kersey.

"Sure!" growled Lute. "But he'll get out. They got him in there for safe keeping—so we can't touch him."

Kersey glanced cautiously around to make sure the door was shut tight. He leaned toward his brother.

"Some of the boys are fixin' up to come over here tonight," said Kersey, dropping his voice. "They're feeling pretty sore. Maybe there'll be some old debts paid off."

Lute Kimball looked long and steadily at his brother, his face betraying a sudden gleam of vindictive anticipation.

"It's about time!" he said fiercely.

Kersey rose and moved toward the door. Lute's eyes were full of questions as his brother turned the knob.

"You wait," said Kersey. "You'll hear about it. I'm going down to the station and look 'round."

IT WAS a worried cashier who met Joseph Reilly as the latter stepped off No. 133 at Star City.

"See that fellow standing over there at the edge of the platform?" said Draper to Joe as they moved toward the office. "That's Kersey Kimball, brother of the fellow who was shot in the shoulder last night. I s'pose Burford told you all about it, and how things were lined up here?"

"Yes, he told me." Joe glanced over at the man. "He looks out of sorts," he said.

"He's watching us," said Draper nervously. "Down here snoopin' 'round to see what's what. Be trouble soon, I'll bet a nickel."

"Bad medicine, is he?" asked Joe.

"Bad medicine is right!" affirmed Draper. "He and his brother Lute sort of lead that Wolf Creek crowd 'round by the nose. They're nearly always at the bottom of any devilishness that bunch raises."

They reached the station door and Draper pushed it open.

"Come in," said the cashier, "and I'll introduce you to the rest of the boys. Afterward, when you're ready we'll go up town and find you a place to stop. We'll try and find Sheriff Lallie, too; you ought to get acquainted with him; it might come in handy."

III

THE Central Hotel stands in the middle of one of Star City's proudest main street blocks. Here Mr. Reilly, newly-come agent, put up, making arrangements for both sleep and victuals. He thought it best to choose this hotel; being located as it was, he could keep watchful eyes on the town's doings, also keeping, meanwhile, his ears open for any chance whisperings.

Moreover, directly across the street from the Central Hotel is located what was the favorite haunt of the Wolf Creekers: the Silver Cloud Bar; a long, low-ceilinged saloon, kept by an old stage-driver.

Nine o'clock P. M. found the Silver Cloud well patronized; and, standing on the curb in front of his hotel, loud yells and catcalls came to Mr. Reilly's ears, sweeping out through the Silver Cloud's swinging doors. Star City, as represented by a gathering of several score of its male citizens, was grouped expectantly at several vantage spots 'round about and near the saloon.

Joe had been standing on the curb for perhaps ten minutes when he was joined by an elderly, tall man: Sheriff Lallie. The cashier and Reilly had located the sheriff late in the afternoon; introductions had followed. Now, as he stepped up beside the agent, the sheriff's face showed the slightest hint of uneasiness.

"That little party of Wolf Creekers over there," he said to Joe, "sounds as if they're working themselves up. Listen 'em yell!"

He spat meditatively into the street.

"Wolf Creek!" floated out from the Silver Cloud, propelled by able and vociferous lungs. "Wolf Creek! A mile wide and a mile deep! Let 'er rip!"

Mr. Reilly grinned at the sheriff as the battle-cry momentarily abated.

"I'd say so too!" said Joe. "How many in the bunch; you know?"

"There were thirty-one pistols left at my office tonight," replied Lallie.

"Have any trouble getting 'em to leave their guns?"

"Not a bit. I was a mite surprised. They all seemed plumb eager to turn their weapons over." The sheriff turned wise eyes on Reilly. "But I got a pretty strong suspicion."

Joe's gaze silently questioned the officer.

"You want to know?" The sheriff

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smiled; his voice lowered guardedly as he bent a little closer. "They got other weapons. They either had 'em along, or else the guns were waiting for 'em here in town."

Joe nodded; he did not seem greatly surprised.

"I was wondering about that, myself," he said.

He was silent while the Wolf Creek battle-cry rose and fell again; then:

"But, not being positive, you of course don't like to bust right in and make 'em either produce or prove their innocence. That might precipitate something."

"Exactly. As long as they do nothing worse'n yell there's no harm done. But I'll keep an eye or two open."

Reilly's gaze was quietly fixed on the doorway of the Silver Cloud. He seemed to be cogitating over something and he merely inclined his head at the sheriff's last words. Presently, though, he glanced at Lallie.

"I believe a little attention'd do that crowd good," said Joe slowly. "They need to be shown. Just at present they think they're bad, that they've got a grievance, and that they're going to do something desperate. And maybe they will do it—if something or some one doesn't stop 'em."

He paused.

Stretched above their heads and reaching from side to side of the street was a white cloth streamer bearing in startling letters the following words:

COME TO STAR CITY. DO IT NOW!

Mr. Reilly's eye happened to light on this streamer as he hesitated in his remarks.

"Do it now!" he suddenly laughed. "That's the stuff! It's a good idea."

He turned to Lallie again.

"Now if somebody'd just go right in there and divert their minds," he went on, "put something over on 'em so strong that they'd look ridiculous, say—or something like that—why, then maybe they'd lose their bloodthirsty ambitions and would sneak off back to Wolf Creek, going through the back door and wishing for nothing so much as that nobody'd notice 'em. Isn't that right?"

The sheriff looked a little bewildered; but he appeared to catch the idea.

"It is," he agreed. "But how, or who——"

"Listen!" interrupted Joe. "Being sheriff, you couldn't very well do it, for the reason I said before. But some one else might. How about me?"

"No, sir!" said the sheriff. His hand fell on Reilly's shoulder. "You'd be a plain everyday fool to go in and try to bulldoze that crowd. You'd come out in pieces. No, sir; you leave it to me. I got a bunch of our boys waitin' 'round here. If this Wolf Creek gang breaks loose they'll know there's a war on."

Joe Reilly shook his head stubbornly.

"That's all right enough," he persisted. "But suppose they do break loose. There'll be a regular riot! And a lot of good fellows'll maybe get hurt on both sides. It's like this: one man can pinch out a fuse easier than a couple dozen can hold down the charge, once the sticks get to goin' off."

Joe smiled into the sheriff's face.

"And maybe if I take a crack at the job it'll not be so one-sided as you'd think."

His eyes grew earnest.

"Don't think I'm blowing," he said. "But I've been around some—even if I'm not so old."

"It'd be a fool stunt," maintained the sheriff. "You keep away.

From the Silver Cloud the battle-cry once more eddied forth; and then, at its conclusion:

"Wolf Creek!" cried a single enthusiast. "Let's go!"

"Hear that?" exclaimed Joe. "They're getting warmed up to it!"

The double doors of the Silver Cloud swung open and a man, tall as the sheriff but more slender, came forth and paused uncertainly on the sidewalk. The rays of a street light fell upon him as he stood there, swaying a little. His appearance was greeted with derisive laughter from the Star City loyalists scattered around.

"Heads up, Slim!" advised a mocking voice. "Watch your step!"

Slim from Wolf Creek shook a wavering fist in the direction of the voice.

"You big mush-head!" he shouted in return, adding a few more choice epithets. "Come over here and I'll lick the daylights out of you!"

Star City joined collectively in another hoot of derision.

"Beat it, Slim!" cried the same voice that had previously spoken. "Beat it, or somebody'll come over there and wipe up the street with you!"

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"Is that so?" roared Slim. His hand slid to his side and a pistol was raised in his fingers. "Come on!" he yelled. "All of you!"

THE nearest Star City citizens immediately squeezed themselves as small as possible, jumping for the nearest telegraph poles and other suitable projections.

"See!" whispered Joe eagerly to Sheriff Lallie. "Just the chance I'm looking for! They got guns, that's sure now. Do it now is the word! I'm off!"

Before the sheriff could remonstrate or detain him Joe had stepped out into the street and was moving swiftly over toward the Wolf Creek man.

Slim, in swinging his pistol on his verbal assailants, had swung around so that his back was partly turned to the approaching Joe. Also, his senses were pretty well befuddled by much liquor; hence he was not aware of Joe's approach until the agent's hand had fallen on him. The Wolf Creeker's pistol was jerked abruptly from his fingers.

"I'll take this myself!" said Joe shortly.

He caught the amazed Slim by the arm, whirled him around and propelled him in the direction of the Silver Cloud's doorway.

"In you go!" said Joe, and shoved the Wolf Creeker through the swinging doors, himself following.

The faces that were turned toward the doorway at the precipitate entrance of the two were all Wolf Creek faces. No man from Star City was present in that dangerous atmosphere. Wolf Creek had the Silver Cloud to itself tonight; except for the bartender, that is—and he was counted as a neutral.

Wolf Creek's citizens were grouped in front of the bar, or adjacent to it. In the center stood Kersey Kimball. Face threatening, glass in hand, the Wolf Creek leader glowered at Slim, and at Slim's conductor; he was not fifteen feet distant from either of them.

"Kimball!" cried Joe sharply, before Kersey or any of his followers could speak. "One of your men has been indiscreet. Slim here had a gun. See!"

Joe raised Slim's pistol so that all might observe; and the point of it was lined steadily and directly at Kersey Kimball's head; the butt of it nestled snugly in the agent's hand; his finger was crooked around the trigger.

Kersey Kimball and his men stared, first at Reilly, then at the steady pistol, and back at Reilly again. Involuntarily, Kersey shifted his feet uneasily, impelled to do so by the menace of that unwavering gun. His eyes flashed to the blinking Slim.

"You fool!" he bellowed in a rage. "You blasted fool!"

Joe Reilly smiled gently. He could appreciate the anger of Kersey at the blundering Slim—displaying his gun so prematurely.

"Yes," said Joe soothingly. "Isn't he though! Carrying a gun around in this town when he knows he's not allowed. What do you mean, Slim?"

He shook the latter's arm. But Slim, helpless and abashed, offered no word.

"You —— busybody!" cried Kersey, turning his rage on Reilly. "What are you butting in on this for?"

Reilly's eyes did not even blink.

"Am I butting in?" he questioned evenly. "I wasn't aware. But I'll tell you: I'm a good Samaritan. The sheriff's out there. And if Lallie had caught Slim he might have put him in the jug for toting a gun. Understand?"

Kersey Kimball squirmed and choked impotently. He was being made to look the fool, right in front of his followers. But, in the face of the unmoving pistol in Reillys' hand, he could do nothing. One false move—either on his own part or on the part of any of his men—would cause that pistol to speak. This Kersey and all present understood without the formality or necessity of words. The man who held the pistol was the master.

Joe Reilly gazed calmly at Kersey, his expression perfectly guileless. And then suddenly a new expression leaped into the agent's eyes, as if some new thought had jumped into his brain.

"Kimball!" he exclaimed. "By thunder! Maybe some more of you fellows have got guns on you! And the first thing you know the sheriff'll be in here and find it out on you if you have; and then you'll all go to the coop!"

His twinkling eyes glistened shrewdly.

"Barkeep!" he called loudly. "Barkeep! Where is he, anyhow?"

There was a stir in the rear of the crowd;

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and from behind the bar issued the red-faced, slightly nervous dispenser.

"Here!" said Joe severely as the barkeeper stepped forward. "You hurry up and see if you can find any pistols on any of these gentlemen. Hustle up now, before the sheriff comes in!"

The barkeeper hustled. He started at one end of the bar and worked toward the other. And, as he progressed, from the person of every gentleman he obtained one pistol. His hands grew full, and he dumped the weapons on a vacant table near the agent. He returned to his task, got another accumulation, and deposited it on the table. His third trip completed the work, the last man disarmed being the fuming, impotent Kersey.

"There!" said the barkeeper, heaving a sigh of thankfulness. "That's all!"

Joe Reilly eyed the mound of pistols in apparent amazement. He looked from the heaped-up table to the Wolf Creek leader.

"Kimball," he said, "you fellows certainly ought to thank me! Just think of the trouble I saved you from getting into. And now, before that sheriff does come in and find all these guns, you boys had all better sneak out the back door and hit the trail for home. Get a move on, boys! Kimball, you kind of see if you can't help 'em to get goin' quick!"

"NOTHING happened then?"

It was Superintendent Burford speaking. He had hurried down to Star City the following morning, anxious about affairs there, and more than half-expecting to see evidences of riot and ruin around the depot and to hear tales of battle and, perhaps, of sudden death.

But, arrived at Star City, the superintendent beheld nothing alarming. The station and its surroundings appeared intact and unharmed. Patrons were moving prosaically in and out of the depot, teamsters were industriously unloading freight from the cars on the sidings.

After stepping off the train the first man the superintendent met was Sheriff Lallie. There was relief in Burford's voice as he spoke the words to the sheriff.

The officer of the law looked soberly at the superintendent.

"Nothing?" said the sheriff dryly. "Nothing?"

His eyes wandered from the superintendent to look at Agent Joseph Reilly. The agent was down by the freight house, busily checking up a truckful of newly arrived express shipments. A little gleam that could easily have been taken for admiration came into the sheriff's eyes.

"Well," he said slowly to Burford, "if nothing keeps happening right along like it did last night I'll have to quit; because I know the boys'll be insisting that I hand my keys over to a better man."

Superintendent Burford's face was turned eagerly toward Lallie; he sensed that something interesting lay underneath the officer's words.

"Yes," said the sheriff, perceiving Burford's eagerness, "if it keeps up I'll have to be handing them over to that new agent of yours!"

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La Paloma

by Frederick J. Liesmann

"LA PALOMA" was her favorite song. That's why I call her "La Paloma." You know that snappy little sunshine-and-rain thing of Sebastian Yradier's—

[I think of the morn when I sailed away from you.

I've heard that all the way from Huachuca to Assiniboine; dance-hall and mess-hall, ballroom and barrack. It's like the Gospel—goes everywhere; and take it from me, boy, I've heard it in places and among people where, if Christ Himself had walked in, I'd have been the only one that was out of place.

Aw, I know I'm only an old spav, but I was Sam's man for thirty years. Thirty good round years in the saddle, boy, and I enjoyed every day of it. Been on the front line against every breed that has mixed with Sam from Sitting Bull to Aguinaldo; fit and willing to sit in with any gink that ever dressed up to a guidon. Did my hitch and came out with a top cutter's diamond on my chevron—and this song!

A song only amounts to what it makes you think about; and this Paloma *canzon* just goes castanetting along with me like the spirit of eternal youth, reminding me of some one that had the world faded to a diaphanous wisp. I know now that she had the heart of a real woman in her. And every time I hear that *tum, ta-tum, clack, tum, ta-tum, clack,* two-four music, I can see her little brown fingers fluttering like a bird's wings at me from God knows where, and hear her saying, like she used to—

"Mai pree-ty boy, mai *vay-ree* pree-ty boy!"

But old Bullard don't come back to me like that. He comes roaring into my mind like a big north wind, with the rumble of hoofs and the crack of the long blue sixes running him neck-and-neck. That big square-shouldered soft-speaking hombre, with his long slim hands and the two eyes of him like clear glass marbles. Heck! You'd play him to be the clerk of some big hotel. But, aw, you bear-cats of the blue and brass! You all laid offa Jimmy Bullard, didn't you? Gunman? Naw! Go against any kind of game. Didn't need a gun. Didn't need anything to work with. All he needed was some one to work on.

Take that time at Hays City when we were hunting the horses. Couple of troop horses got away from camp on a practise march. Old "Whitey," the skipper of L troop, sends me'n Jimmy and little Carmichael out to find them. Breezing back

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with them we run into a rainstorm and put up at a little roadhouse, just out of Hays, to dry out and clean our gear. Tough joint. They were tough those days.

There was a bunch of hard nuts from some ranch in there drinking. They hated a soldier like poison, and they sure made some raw remarks about the Service while we were unsaddling. Bartender was a real wicked individual. He was so hard his face ached, and we had an awful argument with him before he'd even let us put our stuff on the porch of the place.

We didn't pay any attention to them. Just got busy cleaning up. After a bit little Carmichael strolls into the barroom for something and I hear some one say:

"Hey, Blue-belly! Buy a drink."

"Aw, I dunno," I hear Carmichael say.

Skoff! Thump! One of them knocks him limber with a stiff-backed six. Jimmy Bullard's cleaning his saber.

"What the Sam Hill?" says he, getting up with the saber in one hand and a burnishing chain in the other. I frisk my .45 outa the holster and we stall in.

Say, that low black barroom certainly looked like the ante-room to Hades. There's Carmichael lying on the floor, plumb numb to the world. And there's that bunch of killers, six of them, split-second flash-and-a-funeral pistol sharps, armed to the guards and itching for trouble. It gave me the creeps. And Bullard? Bullard rambles right in among them with his head down in his shoulders, like the bulldog that he was.

"Who hit that man?" says he.

"I did, you ——," says a big rough, slapping his hand to his gun.

Zip, went the saber and the gunman did the high dive into the sawdust. I laid my .45 down on them.

"Looky, sports," says I, "exodus!"

Betcherlife they took it out through the doors and windows on the air-line.

"Here Agnes," says Jimmy to the bartender. "Two long whiskies on that bar a little quicker'n you ever done anything in your life or I'll make you walk up that wall like a fly."

The bartender handed us some swift service.

"I take it," cheeps Jimmy, jabbing him about a button and a half above the belt with the saber, "that these drinks are on the house."

"Aw sure, sure," answers the hard hombre right amiable.

"In that case," Jimmy goes on, "here's how!"

And say! When he raised his glass I thought of justice with the sword and scales. That was Bullard. Hard and right as a steel square.

Poor boy! A woman drove him into the Service. Some harmless little thing back in Tennessee.

"Pretty as a rose," he used to say, "and sweet and wholesome as a new loaf of bread. We quarreled, and the world's been a nightmare to me ever since."

He wasn't naturally bad; just mad and loco with heart-hunger. Too much woman in him to forget. It tormented him.

Why, I used to hear him walking the floor of the squad-room and grinding his teeth at night after taps. Nobody ever kicked. Believe me, they sidestepped him like they would a rattlesnake. But he took a great fancy to me. I could put over anything on him. I was a new one; the mark of the rain States was still on me. Used to say I was the only man in the outfit except Whitey that understood him.

"Besides," he'd say, "You've got little freckles on your nose just like my girl has."

We were hanging out at Crook when we got orders for the Rio Grande. It was a P. D. Q. play and they left three of us at Crook to look after troop property until they could make the complete shift. Three months later I blow in on them, staked out in a little dobie town that's hot enough to blister the thumb of a brass monkey.

"Where's Bullard?" says I as soon as I hit the barracks.

"Why," says Johnny Cregan, "I seen him out there on the p'rade-ground a few minutes ago, chinning La Paloma."

Out I busts, paying no attention to this Paloma thing, four jumps down the stairs, two jumps on to the parade-ground, and—*zowie!*

Jimmy Bullard talking to a woman! Looky, my heart kicked backward so hard that it gave me curvature of the spine. I retrogress right back into the barracks, where I can periscope this moll without being spotted myself.

Ho-lee mackerel! She was the finest piece of calico they ever peeled offa the bolt. Talk about your advanced glims!

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My eyes bulged out so far ahead of my face that I could see my own ears. Say, that girl had a pair of lamps that'd stall the angel Gabriel, and they run the bases like Ty Cobb in a world's series. There wasn't a corner on her frame, and every time she smiled you had spontaneous combustion of the heart.

Being struck plumb dead like that, I don't exactly harvest a clear idea of what she's got on, except that it's mainly all silk; and the color scheme of it is such that a full-blown rainbow with a pot of gold hung on to each end of it would look kinda grayish alongside of her. Briefly, she was so doggoned bright that a blind fish'd walk up a tree just for one nibble at her. Yea bo! And when he got to the first limb he'd find me waiting for him with a dip net.

"Some skirt, Jimmy," says I, giving him the Theodore teeth, when he came in.

"Think so? Pike you up to her house tonight and give you a box-seat gawk at her."

I'VE never been able to get used to women. Especially those flashy ones. I approached La Paloma's house that night, feeling like the *Prodigal Son*—wondering whether I was due for the husks or the handshake.

Ow-wowie! She lit on my neck with both hands and both feet. Pulled the Scriptural formula *in toto*. Dealt me the veal—with cabbage.

"Oo-oo!" says she, nailing my hand like a vise. "What a pree-ty boy you ar-r-re!"

Say, if you'd have told me there was a house like hers anywhere in that country I'd have called a doctor for you. It looked like the cave of a predatory wealth. When I woke up I found myself f. o. b., elbow deep in a big fat sofa; deaf, dumb and dizzy. The lady sings out:

"Oho! Paydhro! Eesabella! Awndrayaw! Veeno ee seegareelyos! Pronto!"

Believe me, she hasn't any more than expectorated all that Spanish than *slappy-slappy-slappy*, a barefooted flock of Paydhros and Eesabellas and Awndrayaws bust out of the store-room like bats out of a burning house. And they've got some *veeno* and *seegareelyos*.

Six bottles of wine hit the table together. *Creech-creech!* Goes a corkscrew; *plup*, goes a cork. *Glutch-glutch-glitch!* Three glasses bubble over. *Cr-wisp!* A pack of *cigarillos* tips open.

"Vamos!" chirps the lady; and *slappy-slappy-slappy*, the bunch of barefoots are wafted out with one sweep of her hand.

"A *seegareelyo* for mai vay-ree pree-ty boy," she croons, poking one into my chops with one hand and lighting a match with the other.

"And now a lee-tle dreenk to hees good healt'. *Buena ventura*, genteelmen," she goes on, raising her glass.

Zgwouch! I put down a shot of Spanish wine with a bead on it that would stand you on end.

Ever have anybody stake you out on a chair, when you was a kid, and go over you, inch by inch, like you was a Chinese puzzle? That's what that brazen thing did to me. I was green. So darned green that sheep were dangerous to me; and she spotted it, right off the reel. Plants down beside me and looks me over for a whole minute without saying a word. After a bit she reaches out slowly with her hand and touches me on the cheek.

"Um!" says she, snatching her hand back, with a funny little intake of her breath. "What fonnee lee-tle spots he's got on hees nose." Just like some little kid admiring some other kid's doll.

Figure it for yourself what a three-ringed circus all that was to Bullard. He stretched out in his chair and *haw-hawed* until I wanted to kick a board off of him.

"I theenk, Djimmy," says the lady, "you bettaire geef me thees vay-ree pree-ty boy."

"Aw, he's all yours," answers the big oof. "Take him."

You think she was trying to kid me, don't you? I thought so, too, but for a very short time. Mark it down in your hatband, now, that she was in dead earnest. This girl was rich. She was born into a rich family, and, from her first years, she was used to having her own way in everything. If she wanted anything, it was hers. Spoiled child? Sure.

Her parents were dead, and when she got too wild for the copper-riveted Spanish set in Monterey her very decent old uncle, Tio Emiliano, picketed her out in this little west Texas gopher village, with her aunt, old Tia Isabella, to pull the *duenna* bluff for her. Don't ask me how good or how bad she was. I'll give you all the

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dope I ever got on her, and you can figure it out yourself, just as I did. The big idea was that, just as soon as Bullard said, "He's all yours," she started in to harvest me.

Bullard strolls over to the piano and starts idling along with that *tum, ta-tum, ta* stuff. Up she springs.

"Do you want to hear me seeng?"

"Oh, certainly. Certainly."

Pr-rang, goes the piano, as Bullard starts the first notes of "La Paloma."

"Mai song," says the lady, weaving out on to the floor as light as a troop guidon in a breeze. "Thees ees w'y dey call me La Paloma."

And say, when she began with that, "I think of the morn when I sailed away from you," my heart stood still.

Ever hear a real good singer put on that song, with the dance steps that go with it? Great, eh? When they hit that high place where they say, "Ah, Chinita!" and the way they flutter down to the floor at the end of the song, just like a wounded dove! Boy, this woman had a voice that made you think of a bird by a running brook. And the beauty of her and the way she sang and danced it right at me wasn't only a knockout—it was sudden death and regeneration. It dazed me so that I don't remember a thing of the first evening except that song.

I was still dopey from it the next afternoon, when one of her *taos* blows into the barracks.

"Will the honorable señors come up—" he began.

"Betcherlife, boy. Be up right after retreat."

"What?" says I. "Again?"

"Ag—nothing!" answers Bullard. "As usual."

When we hit the door that evening, there was our lady, decorated like Solomon and the lilies. Honest, when she got about a bale of that silk hung on to her frame she looked like when you get hit in the eye.

"Good-a eveneeng, señors, come right een. Thees house iss your-r-s," and the fireworks started.

Regular one-horse riot of *peons* laughing and scruffling around; her eyes and skirts bouncing and flouncing; my heart doing the aerial high dive; glad hand, with a big "G." We flop and feed. We wine and dine a whole lot. After a bit the lady jerks her thumb toward the door; servants, kids, et certy, get intelligent, give her the *Buena Noche* all 'round, and blow to bed. Lady swings around like a pouter pigeon, bows to me, bows to Bullard, and all bets are off. Sing and dance and bat that old Spanish piano in the teeth until the world looks level. That frisky little cut-up certainly could show you the one big effervescent time of your life.

I'll admit that she got to me quick. But what could you expect? Here I land on the border with all of a greenhorn's old romantic ideas of Spanish women; and, the first roll of the dice, the Spanishest thing that was ever spun in Spain pounces on to me and starts hustling me over the hurdles like I was willed to her by a Dutch uncle. This woman didn't stalk you like they usually do. She rolled over you like a snowslide—and carried you along.

Take it from me, if it hadn't been that she was Bullard's girl I'd have snapped her up so quick it would have made her head swim. But I wouldn't pull a deal like that on a prince like Bullard for anything. Besides, it seemed that she took some of the strain of that Tennessee affair off of him; so I decided to leave things as they were. All the same, I had a half-delicious, half-nervous feeling that she was going to force my hand. I tried to stay away, but whenever Bullard dared to land at her place without me she raised a howl that would jar the Temple of Baal.

So we saw her almost every day, except when she was gone to Monterey. She went there every once in a while. Frisking Tio Emiliano's bank-roll, I suppose, because after each trip there was a new brand of silk out for the regular evening *pasear* on the plaza. All of a sudden, along comes the grandstand play. We start up to her *casa* one evening and some one calls Jimmy back.

"You drill along," says he to me, "and I'll join you in a few minutes."

I think Paloma saw me coming up alone, because when I reached the door she was waiting for me. Her eyes were very bright and her fingers were twitching in a fidgety way when she welcomed me in.

"Hal-lo, Allan. W'ere's Djimmy?"

"Somebody called him back. Be up in a minute."

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THERE was something about her nervous manner that made me uneasy. Take my tip. Whenever you see a woman getting nervous, duck out. Fall into a well. Take a train outa town.

"Huh—hope you're feeling well," says I, making a wild stab at the *sang-fraw* stuff.

"Oh, I am lone-lee," she answers, in a mournful owl-in-a-cañon voice. "I am seek here," laying her hand on her heart.

"Aw, tut, tut! That's from your stomach. Why, girl, there's a lot of people think they've got heart trouble when it's only their stomach."

She looks at me and shakes her head in a strange give-it-up way, as much as to say, "Ye gods and little catfish! What will the fool pull next?" Honest, I really thought she was sick. You can't ever tell about a woman. With all respect to God, I have always thought that He made women too intricate to stand the everyday going. Overwired them, see? Woman gets a bean in her ear and it makes her lame in the right foot.

"Eet ees not that, Allan. You see thees house. Eet ees beeg, reech. I haf mon-ee, land, servant; everytheeng I want. Everytheeng excep'——"

"Oh, Allan, ar-r-re you blind? Mai pree-ty boy, mai vay-ree pree-ty boy, kees me."

Before I realize what's up, her arms slide over my shoulders and right there under my nose is the prettiest face in the world, double-daring me to kiss it. I went wabbly in the knees.

"I can't do that, Paloma. You're Bullard's girl."

"Boolard's gayr-rl!" says she, with a scornful little laugh. "The beeg dog! I steek a kni-eefe through heem. What you care? Even eef I am hees wi-eefe?"

"It wouldn't be fair, Paloma dear."

She started back from me, her eyes blazing. Oh, where was that fool Bullard? Here I'm doing a "Horatius-on-the-bridge" for him, and he's handing me back a "Grouchy-at-Waterloo." If ever I wanted to drop forty acres of west Texas rock on anything, I wanted to drop it on him. Paloma looked around her like a crazy woman. There was a bull-fighter's *espada* hanging on the wall—gift from some *toreador* in Monterey. She snatched it out of the bracket.

"You cold priest! You haf some othair gayr-rl!"

"Never a one, Paloma. Never kissed a woman in my life."

That was the rock-ribbed truth—at that time. But I believe, by the way she came creeping up to me with that *espada*, that it made her worse.

"There are just some things that a white man won't do," I went on. "And this is one of them."

"A white man!" she sneered. "You theenk we Espaneesh ar-r-re not w'ite! You beggar soljaire! You should be glad to be mai sla-eeve!"

And right there I side-stepped in time to let about three feet of that long keen *espada* go by me like a streak of light. That superior stuff was always red rags to my bull.

"Here," says I, flinging her away from me. "I've had enough of this."

I suppose I was madder than I thought, because she staggered away out into the floor and fell over a chair. That made me feel a bit cheap. I picked up my hat and started out.

Paloma flung the *espada* across the room and came running up to me.

"Oh, Allan, Allan," she whispered. "Don't go away from me. I am sor-ree. I nevair do that again. Don't go away. You br-r-reak mai heart——"

We heard a step outside. Paloma ran to the sofa and sat down, just as Bullard came through the door.

"Well, well," says Jimmy. "What's up?"

Paloma never turned a feather.

"I tweest mai foot," she answers quick as a flash; and the first thing we know we're both sitting beside her, sympathizing.

Not a thing happened all evening to remind me of my run-in with Paloma. But on the way home, Bullard stops short and says—

"What was wrong at Paloma's this evening, Allan?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Come on now, boy. Spit it up. Spill it. She made love to you and you turned her down because I'm chasing her, didn't you? Oh, I saw that *espada* lying on the floor. I heard her crying when I came in. Tell me, now. It's for your own good."

Seeing that he was Joseph to the play, I told him the whole thing. When I had

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finished he put his hand on my shoulder and, says he:

"You played the game white and right, Allan. You're square with me. And you know I'll always be square with you, don't you?"

"You bet I do, Jimmy."

"You think you did me a favor. You didn't do anything of the kind. You did yourself a favor."

"Outside! Outside with that!" says I. "Don't try to tell me that it was a favor to me to have to turn her down."

"Look here, Allan. I don't care that," he answers, snapping his fingers, "for Paloma. The only girl I'll ever care for lives back in old Tennessee, and this Paloma woman isn't fit to tie her shoe. Do you know why she left Monterey? She pulled the same deal on two pretty decent young Spaniards that she's trying to pull on us. Got one interested in her and then turned him cold for the other one. They got together in the Plaza one day, and when the smoke cleared up they carted the two of them off to the *iglesia* and planted them. That's why old Tio Emiliano packed her off to this place. Believe me, he'll put up almost anything to keep her here."

"Jee-rusalem! She couldn't have done anything like that!"

"No? Well, she took me around behind the *iglesia* herself. 'There,' says she, poking her finger through the grating. 'There they lie, the poor fools. The two of them weren't worth your little finger.' And now she's trying to throw me for you. I don't want to say any more about her, but any time you find yourself slipping, I'll give you another earful that will make this look cheap. Let her get away with this and she'll do you the same way. What can you expect of a woman who will blow her last *peseta* to see a bull tortured to death in a ring? We'd better keep her hobbled and keep her out of mischief."

"A-men!"

Say, boy, I felt like Fate had cold-decked me; like something had been taken out of my life. To think that a woman who could build up a three-cornered friendship among us like she had; who would entertain us in the whole-hearted way that she did; who had every grace of mind and body, and every advantage of wealth and station; could deliberately play one of us against the other when that thing might easily be a matter of life and death—as it had been at Monterey—well, it was simply beyond me.

She had professed her love for Bullard, even to the extent of sneering at the poor lads lying cold behind the *iglesia* at Monterey. She knew that Jimmy and I were friends. She did not know of the Tennessee girl. She only thought that Jimmy had fallen in love with her the same as all other men did. He had not, nor had he ever pretended to. No more than I had.

She had flung herself at him the same as she flung herself at me. She deceived me, but she never deceived Bullard. She played only to the physical senses of men. Her tactics were those of the she-wolf in the pack. Let the suitors fight to the death, and she trots away with the winner.

If that wasn't Paloma, to the *n*th degree, I'll eat my old hat.

And still, knowing all this, knowing how cold and cruel and deceitful she was at heart, I'll have to confess that I was madly in love with her. Guess I was just about as bad as she. But why did she stick to Bullard? Puzzles you, eh? Puzzled me, too. Let me tell you of a couple of little plays that showed me why. First, there was Tomasso's ball.

WE'RE all going to this fandango. Bullard and I saddle up and go to get Paloma. She must have sensed that we had compared notes on her. Her heart was bad, as the Indians say, but she wasn't making any sign. Her *taos* were a bit late in getting her horse ready. A little lad comes running out with her riding-quirt.

"Your quirt, Señorita Paloma," says he.

Paloma took the quirt and, with all the cold-blooded wickedness of a cat, she cut him across the face with it. Good Lord! I wouldn't have done that for anything. Rather than see any more of that stuff, I went around and cinched up her saddle myself, and we hit for Tomasso's.

This Tomasso sport had a big plate-glass window, about six feet square, in his house. It was the only thing of the kind in that whole country, and it was the Grimes golden apple of his eye. The argument started about midnight. I'm outside, taking a drink of *mescal*, when the music stops

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and I hear Jimmy say to the greasers' head bully—

"Get off the floor, you copper-jawed *cabron!*"

Then the gang went for him with their knives. Jimmy yanked the little oak bench out from under the orchestra and *plack!*

"Gor-Amighty!" squeals the bully, making a wild kick at the ceiling.

Say, for about a minute that place sounded like two phonograph records in an argument—*Car-ramba! Ca-biff! Ca-whack! Car-rajo!*

Naturally, you'd think he couldn't whip the whole bunch; but, at last, they all made the door except one big fat oof that they called Felipe. Jimmy got in his line of retreat. Felipe thought as much of Tomasso's window as any of them; but no Mexican will ever let pride or plate-glass stand between him and his fresh air and his natural right to run. This Felipe person just folded up like a jack-knife.

"Gooda-by!" says he, and came right out through her with a shower of glass.

"Gooda-by's right," says I, lamming him in the chops with the *mescal* bottle.

Then came Tomasso:

"Mai weendow! Mai glayss weendow! I sooner loose mai li-eefe!"

"All right," says Jimmy, and he busts what's left of the bench on Tomasso's head.

He was a natural-born cleaning process.

The three of us didn't only leave that place promptly, but we beat the echo of the scrap offa the landscape by a full neck. We were wise enough to jump out ahead of the pump guns. Paloma was crazy with delight. She rode close up to Bullard and patted him on the back.

"Gooda-boy, Djimmy," she giggles. "Br-reak de gr-reasair head like—w'at you call dat t'ing, Allan, dat's got beeg mane and goes *woo-oo?*"

"Lion?"

"Dat's right. Lion."

"Maybe so, Paloma," answers Jimmy. "But you started that fight. You flirted with the greaser and sicked him on to me. Now, don't ever let it happen again."

That silenced her.

The other time was when we went to a bull-fight in old Mex. They'd killed a bull or two, and it seemed to make Paloma drunk. All the devil in her was bubbling to the surface. I strolled out of the box to get some *cigarillos*. When I came back they were quarreling. Paloma had one of those funny long-bladed Spanish *cuchillos* in her hand. Her eyes looked just like they did when she lunged at me with the *espada*. I heard her say—

"And Allan ees not your proper-rtee."

Bullard nailed her by the arm. The face of him was merciless as flint.

"Say," snaps he. "D'ye want me to toss you into that bull-ring?"

Jimminy! She cringed with terror.

"Oh, no! No! Please, Djimmy, I——"

They shut up when they saw me; but now I understood why she didn't drop Bullard. She was afraid to drop him! Paloma believed in the law of force. She was all physical, and her courage was all physical. And this Bullard was some big, dangerous, physical force.

That was his idea of keeping her hobbled. Just how well it would have worked, I can't say. I only know that being caught between those two maniacs like a grain of wheat between two millstones was rapidly getting on my nerves. And for my escape from that strange situation I'll be forever grateful to Pablino.

Never in a green moon would I have connected Pablino with our affair. Yet Pablino started it, because, if it hadn't been for him, our outfit would never have gone to the border. Also, he ended it; and when he did I realized that, if ever our past-master in double-distilled duplicity, Paloma, had chosen to swing the ax on Jimmy and me, we wouldn't have had one chance in ten thousand.

Pablino was the boss of the biggest and cleverest gang of smugglers that ever cut the west Texas line. In fact, he was so clever that, when every cavalry and ranger captain on the line had grown gray trying to round him up, they sent us down from Crook, P. D. Q., as I've mentioned, to help out. Here's this sport hanging out on the Mexican side with a bunch of moonlight line-jumpers who've got the smuggling game cold-decked to a smooth round cinch.

At every cavalry and ranger station they've got a pack of lookouts on watch day and night. Which, the feed, wages and lives of these fellows depending on the eagleness of their eyes, you can't filter so much as an Army blanket out of a station

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without somebody hiking off through the chaparral to tell Pablino all about it.

That safe and sane old system was a repeater all over the world before customs collecting ever went to the polls, and these greasers had it working like a watch. How Whitey found a weak place in Pablino's system I don't know; but he found one—to our sorrow. For devilish strategy the old skipper of L troop was sealed and stamped on every corner. He beat their loaded, bottled-in-bond game, won the pot, and had to leave it on the table.

Out-thought 'em, out-fought 'em, and out-ran 'em. And lemme tell you that old man was just as earnest about his running as he was about his fighting. Just hit a high place occasionally to keep his bearings.

One nice red-hot afternoon, when Paloma's away on one of her Monterey trips, a shadow falls across the poker table, and there's the self-satisfied speckled frontispiece of Jimmy Bunce, the Old Man's striker, in the window.

"Aw," says Bullard. "You look right comic in a frame. Getting an eyeful, are you, you blankety-blink—" and so on.

Bunce's face cracked open like a busted watermelon, and he chuckled away down in his works after the manner of two baseballs in a barrel.

"You won't orate to that there effect tomorrow, when your tongue's thicker'n a plug of Climax and you've got a stack of alkali on your beak like the horn on a hornoceros," he answers. "Whitey says he knows a patch of chaparral that'll assay enough smugglers to issue every high private in the post a greaser orderly. He's going to sneak out after 'em. Keep mum."

Whitey don't start a still hunt with any "walls of Jericho" getaway. He's wise to that lookout stuff. The extensive preparations he made, to pull the wool over their eyes, made you think of a Dutchman going to bed. First, he issues an order of the day, about a yard long and as complex as a doctor's prescription, calling for the different troops to change barracks. The lookouts picked that off the bulletin board right away.

Under cover of that, and by shifting the men in squads, he kept three troops of cavalry so balled up that it wasn't until the morning of the third day that the lookouts discovered that Whitey and most of L troop were missing. And then it was too late to warn Pablino. Of course, the boys having made all kinds of empty trips after Pablino, they kept mum. Boy, if they'd have paid mileage on that Pablino campaign we'd all have been millionaires.

I'LL BE goodly grilled if ever I saw any one want anything as much as that old head-hunter. Ho-lee coppersmith! All he could say was, "Foreard! Trot! And we, ghost-gray with alkali and all our interiors a rusty velvet from heat and thirst, thump-thumping through a sand-bottomed furnace until our eyes ran around in our heads like rats.

Boy, if you wanta know torment, hit the desert with a troop of U. S. horse.

"Wait! Rest!"

You're sound asleep before you even hit the sand. You're dreaming of the sulfurous walls of the inferno. While you're toiling aimlessly through miles and miles of hot ashes the devil hits you in the ribs with a train of cars and—you wake up with MacDonald, the top sergeant, pulling his boot out of your slats!

"Judas H. Priest! We haven't slept five minutes!"

Mac jerks his thumb over his shoulder and goes to wake the next man. You look. Whitey's personality lined up against the firmament, with a whisky bottle to his head! G'luck! G'luck! G'luck! Air bubbles jumping up like frogs in a pond. It hits his poor parched gizzard; he shakes himself like a wet dog. Wah! Forward! Trot!

Whitey expected to connect with Pablino's gang on the second day. But when evening came, with no smugglers in sight, the Old Man simply collapsed. Third morning he sent the most of us out to scout around as we saw fit. What was the use? Just to kill time, we shot at every jackrabbit and sand-hill crane in west Texas. When we came in, the troop's combined ammunition wouldn't have stuffed a five-cent hunting-case pie.

Next morning we're all cinched up, waiting for the outposts to come in, when here comes Jimmy Bunce, swelled up like a poisoned pup with some big news.

"Sir," says he, giving Whitey the big-four. "Big mounted party with a pack train about a mile below us!"

Whitey and MacDonald hit for the top

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of the nearest knoll and took one look through the field glasses. Meanwhile, you'd ought to have seen the men feeling around in their saddle bags for stray cartridges. Mac came back.

"Boys," he bawls, "it's Pablino, sure's the Lord made little apples; and he's got about two troops of saddle gun operators and packs galore. Be careful about your shooting if we connect with him. If we can't stampede him before the ammunition gives out, he flies our kite. You savvy that?"

In a minute L troop's zig-zagging through the low places like a rattler after a frog; with old Whitey nosing along in front, tickled most to death. The Mexicans never sighted us until we hit a broad flat, about four hundred yards behind them. Jimminy! There were lots of them!

A driver spotted us. He snatched a little Winchester out of his saddle boot and, *Crack-ow! Swiz-zip!* He hands us a blue .44. Right there every greaser in the outfit took one look at us and one yelp at the packs, and every man and beast stretched out and more than hit the grit for Mexico. Whitey sings out—

"Go'n' get 'em, boys!"

We gave our horses the steel and went to get them.

Say, that was some sight. We spreading out, fan-wise, into a skirmish line; their fighting men dribbling back to meet the play; and the whole smear going like greased lightning; with a stiff west wind to dust the board for the big show. A little murmur of delight rippled through the troop when the fours broke into line and there enrolled before them that panoramic sweep of yellow sand, swarming with white and bay and pinto broncos; brilliant with brown-faced, black-haired smugglers in every color of *serapes* and riding jackets and silver-spangled sombreros.

The sun, just crawling up over the edge of the world, like a big red eye, showed us that each one had a saddle gun under his knee and that a long six-shooter was kicking each one in the ribs. And on the other side of them—packs and packs and packs! Oh, I'd have taken twenty-five good shots and jumped the whole band of them for what was in those packs.

The wave of packs flowed across the flat, topped the next ridge with Pablino's fighting line running the dust of them neck-and-neck, and the whole drive sunk out of sight on the other side. We were fanning their heels; we were crowding them to the rail at every jump.

Three hundred yards of landscape skittered past us before you could catch your breath. Two hundred yards ahead, the ridge wabbled drunkenly above the horses' ears. A row of sombreros popped up above the skyline and slapped us in the face with a splash of shot that would stall the devil's own. Down, everybody!

It was a lightning change—the number fours snatching the horses off the line; two or three of these, hit by the greasers, pitching wildly among the men and making them expose themselves in getting out of the way; the Winchester bullets coming *Zip-zip! Zip-zip-zip!* and *spat-spowing* on the ground like so many bricks. Ye gods! But those greasers were shooting fast. They were magazining us, and in twenty seconds that ridge was one long wisp of smoke.

"Deal 'em a hand, you bear cats!" roars Whitey. "Knock 'em loose from there!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before we had the greaser line spouting dust. They were shooting high, but we were drawing on the lower rims of their sombreros; and every time we saw a hat go spinning it was a cinch that its owner had got his ticket for the New Jerusalem. They began chattering like monkeys; they were getting nervous. A bunch of them start shooting at Whitey, who was hiking up and down behind us, swearing by all his gods that he'd have those packs if he had to run them plumb to Sonora.

"Aw, drop it!" yells he, shaking his fist at them. "You couldn't hit your own faces with a drink of whisky."

At this, Jimmy Bullard, itching for a faster fight, sings out—

"Lemme put a four on their flank, Captain."

"Fine! Go to it!"

Bullard, Cregan, Bob Trigg and myself humped their left and handed them a blistering line fire at three hundred steps. The first flight of .45's that lit among them peeled them off that hill like it was hot; and they made a swift reach for their horses. They hit the saddle shooting, and for a minute or two we had the personal attention of the whole bunch.

There were two midgety little *caballeros*

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among them—all togged out in ornamented hats, big red sashes and *serapes*—who seemed to be their king pins. One of these yelled a word or two of Mex at them. About twenty of them slapped their rifles into the saddle boots, drew pistol, and had a skirmish line coming at us before you could say *Queo*.

"Stand pat," says Bullard. "This is money from home."

We bagged three of that bunch before they got in pistol range. Inasmuch as Whitey's number fours had already hit his line with the lead horses, the best these fellows could do was to spill a spatter of pistol shots, as they brushed by, and beat it south with their friends.

We laid out along their flank to keep them moving. Whitey's men swarmed over the bridge and came down the long south slope like a snowslide. The greasers, being lightly loaded, gained a bit on this run; but all of us were rapidly overhauling the packs. In a few minutes we sighted them again, on the other side of a deep *arroyo*, going across a little *mesa* toward a low, rocky hill. One party of them scattered out to the left to block our flanking; the rest were taking cover for another fight. The pace had told on the packs. They were straggling slowly around the hill.

WHITEY'S troop slammed pell-mell into the *arroyo*, dismounted, scrambled out on the *mesa* under a storm of shot from the saddle guns, and advanced by rushes. Seeing that the Old Man was intent on forcing the fight, we doubled backward and, under cover of the *arroyo*, made one long sweep completely around Pablino's right and struck the head of the pack-train coming over the hill in his rear. We made one jump at them with our six-shooters and the burros began milling like cattle in a storm. We were a short hundred and fifty paces behind Pablino's line and he didn't know it.

"Jump the horses to cover in that *arroyo*, Cregan," says Bullard, "and we'll stick for the big show. Between Whitey and us, we'll shuttle them plumb off the map."

The top of the hill was one continuous roll of rifle fire, with Pablino's voice biting through it, trying to make the smugglers take better aim. And then, even before we could take position, the fire of Whitey's men stopped short. A voice sings out from the hill:

"Down with them, brothers! Their ammunition has run out!"

We were cut off!

"Good heavens!" groans Bullard. "The ammunition is out! We——"

The side of the hill burst into a tornadic roar. The pack-train had stampeded—the burros were swarming across the slope like wild-fire. It was one big whirl of dust and din; a cyclone running away with a job-lot of hoofs, saddles and Mexican hats; the drivers whooping up the show with enough Spanish oaths to fresco the ceiling of the inferno.

A gray-looking bunch of something that streaked out in front of that rush blossomed into a Mex driver riding for his life; with his spurs in the flanks of a bronc that was going his height off the ground at every jump, and sliding through the air like a bird. Bullard took a lightning snap at him with the Springfield, at sixty paces, and planked a .45 against the greaser's ribs.

The driver lurched headlong out of the saddle and went bumping into the *arroyo*, his foot tightly caught in the stirrup strap; and spilling *cigarillos* and cartridges as he went. He cheeped about twice, and when the dust cleared we saw his bronc sniffing at the poor devil and whinnying like a little child.

The trail of the stampede whipped past the *arroyo* with one of the fancy little *caballeros* turning it in forty yards of us, not knowing we were there. A burro fell and broke his *apparejo* cinch. Of all the fine silk I ever saw, it burst out of that pack.

"Jimminy!" says Trigg. "Watch the silk fly!"

"Watch the fur fly, you mean," growls Bullard, as the fire spurted out of his Springfield.

The *caballero* pitched out of his saddle, his *serape* falling over his head.

"Get that gun!" screamed Bullard. "Get that gun. Quick!"

When I reached the horse, which had scampered away a bit, the firing had almost ceased. As I pulled the rifle out of the boot, I heard a yell—a Mexican yell. In one glance I saw Whitey's men streaking it northward with the smugglers after them, and ten or twelve Mexicans coming down the hill shooting at Bullard, who was just

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disappearing behind a boulder. And he was dragging Trigg!

I felt like my blood had turned to quicksilver, but I ran back to them and saw that Trigg was done for. Squarely through the mouth. About a pace behind him was Bullard, his feet braced far apart to support his body, which was swaying drunkenly. He had a blotch of blood on the side of him as big as a canteen, and his pistol-hand was wabbling for the first time in his career; but the face of him was many generations of clean white man's courage. I yelled at Cregan to bring up the horses.

Just then the second little *caballero* came flying around the hill, took one horror-stricken look at his pal lying on the ground, and pulled his bronc up so short that he almost stood upright. He saw us, and when the horse's feet hit the ground I saw his rifle coming up. I clapped my gun to my shoulder and knocked him clean out of the saddle. Old Bullard looked at me with his easy little smile and fell in a heap.

The lead was whizzing around us like hail, and Cregan had hardly come up when I heard the spat of a bullet and saw the faint ring of dust where it hit his shirt.

"My God! My God!" he gasped, and slid slowly to earth.

His horse and mine and Bullard's all hit the ground pretty near together. Trigg's made a jump or two with the .44's slashing through him and went to his haunches with a horrible human groan. I'll never, never forget the way he propped himself up on his forefeet, nor the look of pain in his big faithful eyes.

The last chance was gone. I was heart-sick and desperate. I would have fought the devil and all his angels. I turned the saddle gun on the greasers and shook the bullets out of it like a Gatling. By Jimminy! They turned and ran! I heard a spatter of hoofs behind me and—a troop of rangers! Old captain swooping into us, hell-for-leather, with his whole company at his heels!

They hit us with the roar of a fast freight. I heard the *thump-thump* of their horses jumping the *arroyo* as man after man flitted through the dust; a few straggling tail-enders batted by, flat to the horses' necks, quirting and spurring like madmen; there was a sift of falling sand, a rattle of pistol shots; and they slammed into that mess of Mexicans like a pack of bloodhounds.

A warm wave ran over me. Everybody was shooting at everything that resembled a man. The wolf-yelp of the smugglers and the fierce whoop of the rangers sounded clear.

From that suffocating rush, Mex broncos, dust-gray and frantic with fear, bounded into the clear air outside, and stopping with trembling knees and heaving sides, gazed at the bodies of their masters. Then they rumbled away into the desert. The fresh horses of the rangers turned the trick. Think of it. They just happened by on their way to Laredo and heard the firing.

I heard a sob, a groan, the broken, tortured murmur of a prayer. It was the *caballero* whom Bullard had shot. He was telling his beads, poor little fellow; his soul was knocking at heaven's gate. I went up to the *caballero*. I looked once at that face and the soul of me cried out to God. It was Paloma!

"Oh, Allan," she whimpered, with tear-bright eyes, "don't be mad wis me. Poor Pablino! Mai brudder——"

The light went out of her eyes forever.

BETWEEN the rangers and L troop we potted twenty-five of the smugglers and got every blessed burro in the train—near sixty thousand in silk alone. When I asked the sawbones about Bullard he laughed and said:

"Pshaw! He'll be in the saddle before next muster."

So I wrote a letter for him to his dad in Tennessee. About ten days later I get two answers; one with his old man's return and one plain.

"Good luck, Jimmy," says I, breezing into the hospital. "Two letters."

He tore open the plain one, read it, and passed it to me with a childish grin that warmed the heart of me.

"Dear Jimmy," it read, "I was at your mother's house yesterday and read your friend's letter. Jimmy, I want you to come home as soon——"

"Here," says I, "I can't read this. It's personal."

Bullard laughed happily.

"Four months more," chuckles he, holding up four fingers. "And I'm through this enlistment. And then—"

"Well, what then?"

"Tennessee."

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The Camp-Fire

A Free-To-All Meeting-Place For Readers, Writers, And Adventurers

SOMETHING from Frederick J. Liesmann concerning the facts back of his story in this issue:

New York City,
Oct. 11, 1917.

A troop of U. S. Horse *was* thrashed by Mexican smugglers and rescued by Texas Rangers for the reason and in the manner which I describe. I had the yarn from a survivor, good old chief of native scouts and Medal of Honor man, while we were chasing Quentin Salas, Delgado and Jalandoni in Panay in the glorious days of the Empire. Also there was a Pablino, who was Winchestered "over the hill" in a mesquite thicket near the Mex. line by some Ranger or deputy sheriff. I named the smuggler chief after him, thereby conferring upon him a dignity and honor which he probably did not deserve. Of Palomas there has always been a healthy crop. We've all met them.—FREDERICK J. LIESMANN.

HERE is a letter from one of us who helps make our meetings interesting by "coming across" with a bit of personal adventure instead of staying closed up like a clam for fear of seeming to talk too much about himself. I hate a blow-hard and a liar, but the man who has something thousands of other people want to hear and holds on to it merely because he is afraid of what they'll think of him is open to criticism too. It's only that his sort of conceit is ingrowing instead of outgrowing.

This letter begins with a doubt over addressing me as "Art" instead of Mr. Hoffman when he has never met me. In replying I wrote him I didn't care what he called me just so it wasn't something I had to fight over. But that isn't entirely true. I can spare the "Mr." any time and I'd really like it better if you of the Camp-Fire didn't use it in writing or talking to me. When I write letters to you I nearly always address you as "Mr." But that's only because I write thousands of letters, some people would think me fresh or disrespectful if I omitted it, and it's nearly impossible to keep track of which ones would and which ones wouldn't. Also it's a small matter after all and in most cases neither side takes the trouble to speak about it. But please remember that even if you omit it and I use it in answering, nothing is meant by my doing so except that I slipped a cog. I'd much rather get along without any "Mr." on either side.

YOU see, the outworn tradition that an editor is some kind of very superior and superintelligent being dies hard. Nothing doing. We're just like all the rest—know more than some and less than others. You may not know what I know, but I may not know what you know. That's all.

One day one of our writers went to lunch with me. He made no secret of his awe over the impressiveness of meeting a real editor and appearing in public with him. We ate at a hotel where I've gone for years, but he didn't know that there was probably not a soul there among guests or waiters who knew I was an editor or who would have been much interested in that fact. A fellow has to be quite a large bug to attract much attention in New York. But the funny part was that I was feeling at least as much honored as he was. I haven't any

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more reverence for a writer than I have for an editor, but this man was a writer only in his spare time; his regular work seems to me very impressive and he had made his mark in it. While he was feeling impressed with the honor of lunching with me, the object of this deep respect was very conscious of a childish desire, such as most of us never get rid of, that I could stand up and tell all the other people: "Look here. This is ——— ———, of the ——— ———, who was the man who thus and so, and here I am actually having lunch with him!"

I told him, finally, just how I felt and I hope it has forever ruined his awe of at least this editor. Probably it hasn't, for the experience didn't entirely ruin my awe of him. That's the irritating thing—it's so blamed hard to be simple and human and friendly even when we try. I'm just as bad as the rest of you. But at least it helps to clear up the clouds a bit to make an effort in the right direction. I believe in every man's having self-respect and personal dignity, but if mine are the kind that are dependent on such things as whether people address me as "Mr.," then they can't be worth much and I don't want them. We're all very much alike. What's the use of pretending differently?

AND sometimes it hurts. The other day an engine-driver wrote to me about something and when I replied he wrote again to say how surprised and gratified he was that I had actually taken the trouble to answer an old engine-driver fully and personally. That hurt. Why *wouldn't* I answer him? There isn't time to answer all the thousands of letters personally, but every one that calls for a personal reply instead of a form letter gets it, and there certainly isn't any discrimination between rich and poor, high and low. As I told him, we're all driving engines of one kind or another, unless we're wasters or rotters, and it doesn't matter what the engine is so long as it is an honest and clean and useful one.

And he was an American, too. There's too much of that feeling in America, where there should be none of it.

IF ANY one thinks I'm saying all this merely as a bit of jolly and for policy's sake, I'll disabuse him. I reserve my right to pick and choose my friends—among the Camp-Fire or anywhere else. Most of you whom I've met or got acquainted with through letters, I like and want to be friends with. Some of you are rotters or fools and I have no use for you. Some of you doubtless have equal disregard for me. No, I'm not jollying anybody. Just trying to cut out needless formality.

And now, after talking so much, I'll call it off and let you read our comrade's letter. Needless to say I'm glad to be called "friend" when I believe it's meant, as I believe it is here. I think I've already registered in agreement with his idea that some women have as good a right as any men to claim a front seat at our Camp-Fire.

Cleveland.

DEAR FRIEND ART: I suppose it's all right to call you Art. I've been with you for about five years now. I *know* it's all right to call you friend. . . . You know I am pretty much disgusted myself tonight; I missed out on going "Over." I believe the last time I wrote you I had just received my discharge from President Madero and had left Mexico City for Arizona. Well, when Huerta killed Madero I went back to Mexico again and fought against the Huerta régime. But when Carranza got to quarreling over who was the big chief I got disgusted and quit and went back to Arizona again.

ABOUT that time Col. Roosevelt offered Congress a division of volunteers and your humble servant went about organizing a regiment out in Arizona to help make up that division. Well, that fell flat. So when the troops went into Mexico after our friend Villa, I went with them, and came out with them. And although that was just a pink tea compared to what we have on our hands now, still I've been in some *very, very* tight places—the kind of a fix where you haven't time to think. You ask us for tales, so I am going to give you one. Oh, it's true. That's why it's good, and it leads up to something that I have wanted to put up to Camp-Fire for a long time. And any of the bunch that has had any dealings in Mexico will know. Anyway, here's the tale.

It happened in Mexico, and José Inez Salazar was one of the chief actors, he and I and a woman. (I read a report of his death not long ago, may the devil give him special attention!)

SALAZAR at that time had a band of about two hundred ignorant, degenerate mongrels who termed themselves revolutionists. Yes, that's what they styled themselves. They didn't have nerve enough to be bandits. And they just sneaked around over the country, friendly through fear of them, and looted wherever they found a town defenseless. And one day they rode into San ——. There were at that time about twenty Americans living and working at San ——, and they didn't like the idea of being looted. But Salazar and his mongrels looted just the same. And then there had been quite a lot of talk of intervention by the

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U. S. about that time, and Salazar was in an anti-gringo fury and had ordered his men to pay especial attention not to overlook looting all the gringoes, giving his men free rein.

I was staying with an American lady whose husband had been killed in one of their raids, and she had no love for a Mexican, bandit or otherwise, and knowing that I had served Madero's forces in Mexico, appealed to me to save her property from being looted and perhaps her from being brutalized (for this sort of thing happened quite frequently). I agreed to do all in my power to help her, and when the looting party came to the house and demanded entrance I went out to them and, showing them my commission as a captain of the revolutionary forces, told them that house and occupants were under my protection and not to be molested. The *'teniente* in charge, a big ignorant clod, read my commission upside down, looked me over, grudgingly decided that I must be some *jefe*, and ordered the men to enter the next house. But I knew it wasn't all over, for I knew *'teniente* was going to report to Salazar.

THAT afternoon Salazar made a fiery, denunciating, anti-gringo speech in the plaza, calling Americans by all the names he could think of, telling us we were low-lived cowards and afraid to fight. Some of the things he said would make a man's blood boil. He then ordered every American in the town to bring in his arms and ammunition under penalty of death and a relooting of all Americans' homes. I heard that speech, and I made up my mind there was one American's home in that town that wasn't going to be looted and there was one gringo that wasn't going to give up his arms, to Salazar or any one else.

I hurried back to Mrs. K.'s and told her just how things stood, and I didn't try to smooth it over, either. I asked her if she wanted to let me go ahead and protect her and her property or if she wanted to give up and let me go ahead and make out the best I could. She said "No, this is all I have in the world and I am going to keep it if I can." I'll tell you, Art, the odds were heavy, and I wanted to keep a fight down if I could. So I got my rifle, we took the floor up—that is a board in the floor—and put both rifles under the board. I had two belts of ammunition and one of these she put around her under her clothes. And I did the same with the other and my six-shooter, where I could get it quick and handy. And it wasn't long before they came.

THIS time another officer was in charge. They kicked the door in and fifteen of them crowded into the house. I asked them what they wanted. The officer spoke up and said General Salazar had issued orders for every house to be searched for guns and ammunition. I then told him I was a captain in the revolutionary army and showed him my commission. I told him there were no guns or ammunition concealed in the house and that the only gun around was my six-shooter and that I intended to keep that. I also told him that I vouched for the lady of the house as a tried and true friend of the revolution, and that even her husband had been killed for the cause; that I knew orders had to be obeyed, but that I would consider he had paid me an especial favor if he would order his men not to molest anything in the house in their search. That line of flattery got him, and he ordered his men not to help themselves. They searched, but they did not find the ammunition either.

But the other *'teniente* had reported my august presence in the town and, when the second raiding party reported, Salazar questioned the officer about the gringo captain and of course the officer reported that the house had been searched but nothing taken and that I only had a six-shooter that I refused to give up.

WELL, when Salazar heard that report, believe me, the game commenced to loosen up. He sent that officer back with twenty men to get that six-shooter and to loot the house. But I saw them coming blocks away and so did Mrs. K. She knew what it meant. We got the rifle out. She took one belt of shells, I the other, and I looked at her, Art, her face was as white as a sheet. But I knew she'd stick. She never said a word, just cried a little.

The officer and his men marched up to the door, I beat them to it, opened the door a little ways and asked him what he wanted and why should I be molested three times in the one day. Had I found favor with the general? He informed me that I was to deliver up my revolver and to accompany him to General Salazar. I shut the door in his face and politely told him to go to ——. Mrs. K. went to the front window and poked the rifle out just as cool as you please, and we waited. Art, it seemed just like a million years I stood just back of that door waiting for a volley.

THEN we heard some one ride up on horseback. Five shots were fired through the door. I was lying on the floor and I opened fire, and then Mrs. K. yelled at me to stop shooting, that they were all running away. I didn't know what to make of it, for I knew they wouldn't give up that easy when they knew they were ten to one. But finally I got up nerve enough to peep out of the window and, sure enough, they were running toward the plaza as hard as they could go.

In about half an hour one of Mrs. K.'s Mexican neighbors came over to the house and explained the thing. Escondone, another revolutionary chief and a bitter enemy of Salazar's, with about fifteen hundred men, had marched up to within three miles of San —— before Salazar found it out, and then Salazar beat it quick. Escondone came in the next morning and in a few days everybody forgot Salazar, which only goes to show that the devil takes care of his own.

NOW here's the idea: There was a woman with the real stuff in her, and she is not the only one in Mexico and elsewhere who are hoeing their own row. There are a lot of women in this world that are real true adventurers, women who are willing to and do take just as big chances as men do. Why not get them into the circle? Let them tell about where they have bucked the fickle goddess. Get the idea? Think it over and let's hear from it some time, eh?

Well, being as I know I've talked till midnight and ain't said much either, I guess I'd better throw some wood on the fire, chain up the dog, and crawl in the blankets. So will say "*Buenas noches, amigo.*"—E. A. TALBERT.

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FROM Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur an interesting word on their story in this number:

Modern military mining and trenchwork is directly descended from medieval siege-craft. To undermine your opponent's wall and bring it tumbling down in the manner described was a well-known and well-approved practise, long before Roger Bacon mixed the first batch of gunpowder. And a long projecting angle of wall or tower was the best place to sap, which is why square towers went out of fashion and round ones came in, in the later Middle Ages.

(N. B. to the editor: Please do not let mistaken zeal on the proof-reader's part change "Sicanian" and "Sicelian" to "Sicilian," for these are the names of two of the strange, pre-Hellenic races of the island, here mentioned to remind the reader of the many people who have fought one another for the treasure-island of the Mediterranean.)

HERE'S a letter from an American officer in France, a Camp-Fire comrade known to many of us. He didn't tell me what the souvenir was, but I can give a sort of guess—and a sort of a gasp. But his suggestion of putting a curb on self-elected heroes after the war is the important point:

If you can find a place, or think it deserves it, would you put the following suggestion in "Camp-Fire," on the chance that some one will take it up. We all know of the many Civil War "veterans," generals, colonels, majors and others, who never heard a shot fired. Will it not be the same after this war? We have a lot of limousine sports who will go home with more medals and get more glory than the lads who were up front. Why could they not make a national or state military directory, with every man's name who served and a notation of battles and wounds? Is it too big a proposition, or might the camouflage birds buck it?

ABOUT that souvenir now. The alcohol must have been poor stuff, or else I did not seal the bottle properly, because there is a very suspicious odor about it, and I'm about come to the conclusion that it will have to be chucked away. However, I'll be going up again soon and I'll make sure of a better job this time. If there is any part of Fritz's equipment that you'd care for too, let me know, but please don't say a helmet unless you mean one of the steel trench ones. The others travel too fast for a poor infantryman to catch.

AND still our collection of information on the pioneers of the Old West grows and grows:

Los Angeles.

In answer to "D. W." in a late issue of *Adventure* as to my probably referring to Capt. George E. Bartlett in one of my letters to Camp-Fire, I would state that such was the case. Bartlett was a very intimate friend of mine for several years prior to his death in this city about six years ago, and I had charge of his funeral, as he would not even see any one but me during his last illness. He is buried in Rosedale Cemetery here. I have his entire collection of Indian relics, from which the photos were taken which are to be shown in *Adventure* some time in the future.

THE inference is also correct about his finding the little Indian girl on the battle-field of Wounded Knee three days after the fight, and her adoption by Gen. Colby. The girl was married some five years ago to a man in Oregon or Washington. It is also true that Calamity Jane saved Bartlett's life on one occasion by nursing him through a very serious sickness. At the time of the Ghost Dance uprising in December, 1890, Bartlett was the only scout at Pine Ridge who had the nerve to visit the hostile camp of Chief No Water on White Clay Creek, at the instance of Gen. Miles, to secure some very valuable information. Both Buffalo Bill and Gen. Miles said when he left that they never expected him to return alive.

"D. W." refers to a horse-thief whom Bartlett shot. I have the saddle, cartridge-belt and knife which Bartlett took from the dead outlaw. A bullet-hole through the cantle of the saddle, which also clipped the top of one of the shells in the thief's belt, testified to Bartlett's marksmanship—together with the bullet-hole through the body of the outlaw.

Bartlett was well known and highly esteemed by the Sioux and, as he spoke the Sioux language fluently, he was of great service to the army officials as an interpreter at the councils and powwows with the hostiles. Later, he traveled on the road for the Peters Cartridge Company of Cincinnati, demonstrating their ammunition, and was called "the marvelous marksman" because of his dexterity with firearms. In the collection of Indian trophies mentioned above, I have the beautifully beaded buckskin suit which Bartlett wore at Pine Ridge about 1886, and several of the ghost-dance shirts which went through the war and which were supposed to be "bullet-proof" by the savages. I also have in this collection the finest and most beautiful war-bonnet I have ever seen in any collection of Indian trophies. Bartlett told me he had refused three hundred dollars for it.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

HI! GEOLOGISTS, physicists, scientists in general, here's one of you asking the rest of you some questions. Thomas Samson Miller started it with some "Ask Adventure" information about the sound-communication system of West African and other savages:

In your magazine of November 3d I read of the Nigerian natives communicating with each other by drumming on the ground and I became greatly interested because I know of cases in my own experience, which have always puzzled me very much and I have never been able to solve the mystery.

I MAY say since childhood I have been tangled up with botany, geology and astronomy and have a fine telescope and microscope and am always "sticking my nose into this and that," at least sufficiently to be known as "an old crank" who sits up all night to look at the stars or spends

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an hour in cutting up a spider and magnifying its internal parts.

When I was a young man in England some of us would take a long walk on a Saturday night to a village three or four miles out of town, have some bread and cheese and a glass of excellent home-brewed beer and walk home again. About a half-mile from this village stood an old and big elm-tree beside the sidewalk, and, standing under this tree, one could feel the strokes of the blacksmith on his anvil in the village. The first time I felt it I found "Old Tom" was just closing up his shop and he told me he had been putting on a horseshoe for a traveler. Several times during the three years I lived in that town I have had the same experience and, though giving it much thought and consideration, I never solved it. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it.

I COULD give several other instances, but for fear of making this letter too long I will state only one more. On a ranch in Texas where I used to spend a week in Fall botanizing and picking up fossils, insects and plants, I had a room in a house about five or six miles from where a railroad crossed the country, and when a train passed, only one window in my room used to shake and chatter for three or four minutes. The country between was very rough and rocky, with hills, cañons, valleys—snakes, armadillos, tarantulas and other friendly insects in plenty.

Now I have no doubt you have many scientific readers in your family of subscribers so let them scratch their heads and ponder over these two facts and send you a solution of the mystery.

IF THE sound is carried down, it must be by a pillar or column, entirely detached from surrounding matter. It must then be imparted to a rocky layer of homogeneous formation, for by a crack or "shake" all vibration would be diverted and lost. It must then be carried up again to the surface by another isolated and solid pillar. There is a solid rock in the formations of West Texas rocks, which is solid and without cracks or shakes and which I have seen extending along the bluffs for several miles; this might answer for carrying sound along, but how about the descending and ascending pillars or columns?

Should your esteemed wiseacres solve this, then tell me how it is only one window in the house of six or seven rooms responds to the sound waves and all the rest are silent?

I am making this letter too long but some other time will send another dose—meanwhile let your peripatetic philosophers study over these two riddles and send me their solutions through your magazine.
—"AN OLD CRANK."

CHARLES BEADLE'S story in this issue is not his first in our magazine but, though he followed our established custom and sent in his self-introductory talk to the Camp-Fire, the mails brought it too late to appear along with his former story, "The Christman," so here it is in the issue with "The Idol of It:"

My native heath is somewhere in mid-Atlantic. I was born rolling and have been ever since. No moss. My infancy was spent around Siam and the farther East: early memories, fire-flies, mosquitoes and ayahs. Educated at boarding-schools in England; hence no home life and consequent atrophy of the sentimentalities. Parental Government required me to become a consulting marine engineer; but a congenital dislike of work and a gaudy poster persuaded me to learn poker, to starve in Cape Town where I held down a waiter's job for four hours, and to join the British South African Police.

TOO late for big rebellion but kindly chief got up a small one to console me; saw Boer War in B. S. A. P., Morley's Scouts (unpaid Looting Corps) (if any of the Scouts should read this should be glad to hear from them) and Stock Recovery Dept. After Peace held various jobs from three days to a week—in a news office, a bar, hawker, insurance agent—and peddled cheap jewelry for three months (and made money!): served in Transvaal Customs and became Asst. Compound Manager to the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association.

Then I raised a syndicate to finance me for an exploring-trip on the headwaters of the Zambesi ("The Christman" scene). Returned to London to promote a company; failed—of course. A head on a coin sent me to British East Africa and Uganda; native trading, running transport from Victoria Nyanza to the Kilo Mines, Congo; shooting and various ventures. England again, company promoting; and failed again.

Went to Dutch Borneo, rubber planting. Afterward returned to go to Morocco; penetrated into interior in disguise during rebellion; met Pretender Sultan, Mulai Hafid; instead of cutting my throat or crucifying me as predicted he gave me a palace and an escort and treated me as an Ambassador; eventually I failed and Hafid lost his throne. We both had a royal time, anyway.

Until I came to America last year I have lived in France.

THE material of the "Idol of It" was gathered in the forests of the Upper Ituri district of the Congo when I was running caravan through from Entebbe to Kilo. As brothers of the solitude know, many strange things happen and stranger states of mind come to pass. The trick of chatting to a photo or a magazine cutting for the sake of companionship and hearing your own white voice is not uncommon. I've done it myself. In the Police I had a mate on an out-station who did go crazy. He was given his discharge later, started off to walk (!) to Umtali and encountered a lion. Apparently the lion was not dying for social companionship as poor old Denham was!

THE scene of "The Christman" is laid on the upper waters of the Zambesi; in fact, the exact village is indicated. The story was founded—or rather suggested—by an incident which happened on my trip. A bearded gentleman—as described in the story—arrived at Livingstone from nowhere in particular with a wonderful tale of hidden jewels and buried ivory in the southern Congo. A prospector named Poindextre fell for it and financed the *safari*. Just after they had gone we heard that our bearded friend was wanted for murder and robbery in Cape Town. The next thing was that Poindextre was found nearly dead with black water fever in

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a native kraal. His charming partner had abandoned him in the bush, taking guns and outfit. Natives had found him. He recovered, came down to Livingstone, had a relapse and died. "Miêville" was never heard of again.—CHARLES BEADLE.

HER story having been scheduled for an earlier issue and taken out at the last moment, in this issue you have Lotta Adele Gannett's story without her talk to Camp-Fire, just as you had, in the other issue, her talk without her story. I guess the blame is up to me.

OUR discussion of ants brings in another contribution of personal experience. I confess that when a kid I did the same thing Mr. Sleeper did as a kid. Though most kids are cruel and though I'm glad to say I didn't run much in that direction, I still feel shame over what I did to those ants. For one thing, they were so much bigger than I in their unfaltering bravery and tremendous tenacity, contending on the heroic scale because a brat of a kid wanted to amuse his very unheroic self. I didn't have brains enough, luckily, to try a general battle, but confined my experiments to individual duels. My ants, however, behaved, so far as I can remember, just as Mr. Sleeper's did.

Incidentally, if any kids read this I hope they won't be darned fools enough to try. A grown man oughtn't to need the advice. There's enough cruelty in the world just now without dragging the ants into it.

First comes the clipping Mr. Sleeper enclosed from the Boston *Globe:*

On a day that a great battle took place on the Western front in Europe I witnessed a fierce and bloody hand-to-hand fight in my garden. And over nothing but cattle.

A CERTAIN kind of plant-lice are the cows of ants; the ants stable the lice in their underground homes, and every morning they bring them to pasture in the gardens, where they feed on the plants. The plant-lice produce a sweet secretion which the ants drink; in fact, it is their milk.

The battle I witnessed was between armies of black and red ants. The black ants were the owners of the herd pastured in my potato field, and the red ants were rustlers trying to stampede and drive off the herd.

EVERYWHERE I saw red and black ants fighting to the very death. The ants clawed at one another, gnawing off each other's feelers and legs. There was no quarter—it was a fight to the death. The cattle huddled together in a group, helpless and apparently disinterested spectators of one of the greatest battles ever fought in the ant world.

I watched the battle till near sundown, and when I left it waged as fiercely as ever. Apparently the black ants were victorious, for the next day I noticed them peacefully tending their flocks in my garden.

Now for Mr. Sleeper's own letter:

South Hanson, Mass.

I was interested by the few lines concerning the habits of ants. A few days later I chanced upon the enclosed in a Boston newspaper and thought you or some of the Camp-Fire members would be interested in reading it.

I HAVE never been so fortunate as to be an observer at a battle of ants; but, I take shame to myself in telling this, when I was a kid I tried often to bring different tribes together on the battlefield. I noticed one day that individuals of different tribes, while apparently carrying on their regular, daily business, would occasionally come unexpectedly face to face. Invariably both raised the antennæ and remained motionless for a second or more, the antennæ touching. Then both would step back, and each would turn off about his business. It struck me at once that this must be the usual way in which stranger ants investigated one another, but it reminded me of the way in which two gentlemen might have met in some age past. It was almost as if two men had met, clashed their swords together, and then gone on.

SO I did a cruel thing in the hope of learning something further. I caught and injured a specimen of each tribe, and then pushed them together on a flat stone which was swarming with their fellows. They grappled without delay, and soon the surface of the stone was covered with fighting ants, some in pairs and some in groups of three or more. The loss of one or even two legs did not seem to sap the desire for fight. The chief object of each warrior seemed to be to get upon his adversary from the rear and sink the nippers into the "small of his back," or the junction of thorax and abdomen. Several hours after the start of this battle several of these groups were still holding whatever grips they had managed to place, and many of them died, still hanging on.

I am not a scientific observer, but I learned one fact concerning ants: the bulldog has nothing on the ant for gameness, or for holding on once he has closed his jaws in a fight.—MYRON O. SLEEPER.

IT DID not take you long to discover the drama and romance and adventure behind the human-story items of our "Lost Trails" department, but I wonder how many readers have realized the dramatic tales our Identification Cards could tell if they could talk to us. Here, for example, is a look-in given by one of the thousands who carry them. He begins by recalling the morning he dropped in at the office and got a card at 10:30 before sailing at 12, and goes on to say that since that day he "knows personally over five hundred persons, somewhere on earth, who are today (please God) holding them." And then:

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Since the war started—I've tried to do my bit wherever I was most needed for Uncle Sam. Some weeks ago met one of the Japanese mission who was my room-mate in college, 1900-01, and exchanging my card with him he noticed my No. 1484 card, and produced a duplicate in all but number that he carries next his heart. A few weeks later had the same experience happen with one of H. B. M.'s officers on a special mission to this country, who obtained his card on active duty in India. The same week one of our own officers on his way to the front after several years active service in the Philippines was proud of his card and wanted to know how I had taken precedence of him in getting a lower number, one of the two-thousand class. A week later, in another part of the country, had some work which brought me in touch with a Russian M. E. (Mechanical Engineer), who told me he had taken his card after an afternoon in Paris.

THEN to finish: Scene, front of Café de la Paix, Paris; one of my friends whom I couldn't place bumped into me; proved to be (in 1897) our Broadway and Thirty-first Street traffic officer; on his way home as major of Philippine Constabulary on long leave. Talked cards and, through my talking up mine, bumped into me again last week—on his way to France and, he says, Berlin, and identified himself by the card which he had taken out as soon as he got in touch with you. And so it goes.—No. 1484, in care of *Adventure*.

THE following from the organized publishers and writers of magazines, addressed to the readers of magazines, is a strong presentation of the evils of the "zone system" postal law:

Do you wish to put a tariff on intelligence? Do you want to levy a tax on education? Congress does. Your Congress. What! You didn't know about it! Read:

AT THE last session Congress passed a law which establishes a postal "zone" system for magazines and periodicals. It passed a law increasing the postage on periodicals to you, the readers of this publication, from fifty to nine hundred per cent. And it did it by reestablishing a postage "zone" system that was abolished by President Lincoln in 1863. Instead of a flat rate, made as cheap as possible in order that there could be a chance for the intelligent consideration of public questions to reach the farthest limits of the country and the most remote habitation on an equal basis, the magazines containing all this discussion and all the best fiction and all the best art must hereafter pay an excess rate like so much fish or canned lobster or fabricated steel.

You are going to buy your education by the pound-mile now. It isn't a free flowing stream from which all may drink. It has been dammed and its flow checked. Congress did it. If it would bring any increase to the revenues of the country that would amount to anything, it would never be opposed. But it won't. It will drive magazines out of business.

WE WOULDN'T say that the discussion of public questions in the magazines, which sometimes calls attention to the delinquencies of Congress and public officials, resulted in the enactment of this law. We would not say that it is a form of censorship that is really prohibited in spirit by the Constitution, although the law has been so cleverly drawn that it probably can not be called unconstitutional. We simply call your attention to it because we don't believe you know it. And further than that, we don't believe you'll stand for it.

Write to your Congressman about it. And demand the repeal of this particular passage.

I may be prejudiced, so I do not ask any one to accept my opinion. But consider this matter for yourself. Magazines and periodicals amuse and entertain, but they do something much more important. They are educational in a very high sense of the word. How much of your knowledge of public affairs is due to magazines? If they are killed off, what other means is there of getting anywhere near the same amount of knowledge about public, particularly national, affairs? Books, newspapers, lectures, individuals. All are valuable, but all have their limitations—expense, rarity, localism, etc. Compare all these together with the periodicals alone.

THIS zone law, if not repealed, will cripple all periodicals. Those that can continue to exist must pay often nine times as much as at present in order to reach you. They may be able and willing to shoulder part of this extra expense, but who will pay most of it? You. Unless you give up your magazines.

To my mind the worst result of killing off the magazines would be the resultant growth of sectionalism. Our country is three thousand miles across. In union there is strength; in sectional development there is destruction. Do we need every possible medium that serves to draw us closer together by mutual information and understanding among the sections? Do we especially need the periodicals that give us a national, not a sectional, point of view?

Think it over.

IF YOU want to join in organized effort against sedition and enemy activity in our midst, join the American Defense Society. Among its objects are the internment of those who need it, the suppression of publications in the German language during the war, and the abolishment of the compulsory study of German in public schools. Address 44 East 23d St., New York.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: All issues complete to date from May, 1915.—C. V. DILS, Reading, Ohio.

Wanted: Copies of *Adventure* for July and August, 1912, containing the serial "The Message."—GARDNER HUNTING, Oliver Morosco Photoplay Co., 201 N. Occidental Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

(As the magazine is made up several months in advance, the above notice will appear with only such stray names as happen to come in to us until there has been time for it to reach the camps and the front and for names and addresses to reach us, be put in type and then reach our readers on publication.)

Privates SAM FRIEBERGER and JAMES F. SCOTT, care of *Adventure*.

Private GEO. A. NELKE, care of *Adventure*.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure — A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
J. P. TUCKER, Hotel Lansdale, 1410 Minor Ave., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Tucker.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake, Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

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16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, 4151Eighth Ave., Huntington, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada, covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Grand Isle, Louisiana. Covering geography, hunting, equipment trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lockwitsky.

The Seward Peninsula—Alaska

Question:—"Can you give me some information regarding the Seward Peninsula District of Alaska, as to: average temperature, Summer and Winter, timber and grass, game and fur-bearing animals, placer gold? I have been told that there is quite a district in the peninsula that has never been explored and that there is favorable indication of placer in parts of the peninsula. Where can I secure a reliable map of that part of Alaska? I've punched cows in the Indian territory and Montana and prospected in Arizona and the Northern Rockies so am not a tenderfoot."—BEN DAVIS, Ekalaka, Montana.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I can certainly give you correct information regarding the Seward Peninsula, as that was my main stamping-ground in Alaska for many years, and I know literally every foot of it. Your question, however, is in some respects so general, and covers so many points that I shall have to confine myself to what I take to be your chief interests and will then refer you to the Government reports for further details.

The peninsula is a little higher in Winter temperature and lower in Summer than in the interior of Alaska, but as there is often a nasty wind—blizzards—in Winter, the climate can not be said to be so agreeable as in the Yukon, which really hasn't a bad climate at all, barring the length of the Winter. The average Winter temperature is about zero to ten below, but it goes down to forty and fifty below occasionally in December and January. Summer is like Spring in the States.

The peninsula has been well prospected, though away from Nome, Council and the Candle District in the North there are still occasional small strikes. I would hardly recommend it as a virgin field for prospecting, however, though for straight development in a mining way it's still good country. Placer has been the main mining, and the peninsula has produced about a quarter of all the gold taken out of Alaska, barring the big Treadwell group of mines way down toward Juneau.

Most of it is a treeless country, and it is not much of a game region, though the fishing is good. Of fur-bearing animals, there is a fair sprinkling, but here again, the interior in many places is superior. There is practically no grass, and agriculture is almost out of the question. It is pretty far north in Alaska, you see, and the mining game is the thing. There are a great many minerals that people are turning to—tin and graphite and a lot more.

The boom times there were over eight or nine years ago, but it is a great little dredging country now—one of the best in the world. They run about thirty dredges there now. It's a good place for a good miner with capital—a mining engineer is the fellow who is needed at this stage of the game in the Nome region. The prospector or small-scale

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miner doesn't stand much chance there now, but the rest of Alaska is still good for him.

Just write to the U. S. Geological Survey for a list of the Seward Peninsula publications—or of all of Alaska, if you wish—and when it comes, select the publications and the map you wish. The map will cost a few cents, but the publications are free and most of them contain maps anyhow. It has been thoroughly done by the survey and you can get all the dope in great detail.

To Learn Navigation

Question:—"I am a boy nearly seventeen years old and intend to make the sea my life profession. Could you tell me the names and addresses of some navigation schools and their fees? Can one who has finished the eighth grade in a public school qualify later for a captaincy? Do you think it would be better to ship as an apprentice seaman first on board a sailing vessel attending a navigation school? Would it be difficult to ship as an apprentice seaman on a bark or some other sailing vessel in an Eastern port? What is the salary of a captain and second mate from a tramp steamer or sailing vessel to a first-class liner?"—EDWARD KNOPF, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—I believe your very best plan at this period is to apply to Captain Reisenberg, School-Ship *Newport*, North River, New York. Even if his vessel is filled up, he will gladly direct you to one which needs cadets; and there is no better method today of arriving at a merchant-marine officer's rating.

It is not usual for American sailing ships to take apprentices; you might ship as boy, but why do this when as a cadet on a school-ship you can learn seamanship and navigation together, with the best of instructors? In a sailing ship, as boy, you will only be a very inferior servant to rough-neck foc's'le hands, and if you learn any navigation at all it will be by your own efforts in your own time.

As for navigation schools, they won't do you a bit of good until you have been to sea and attained experience. You can not take any navigation examination until you can produce documentary proof that your experience qualifies you to take charge of a watch.

Salaries vary so much—owing to war conditions—that it is scarcely possible to give you information which will hold good at the middle of the year. Before the war, a second mate of a cargo steamer or sailing ship, foreign trade, got anywhere from forty dollars to seventy-five dollars a month, according to tonnage and trade; second mate of a liner might get rather more, but no fixed amount, because liners may still be first-class and vary from ten thousand to fifty thousand tons, when the second mate of the big ship probably will get as much as the skipper of the smaller. Rates are now as much as four times the above, and may change the moment the war lets up; but never mind wages now; they'll be settled before you need worry about them.

Ranching in California

Question:—"I want to thank you for the kind, interesting and encouraging letter you wrote me. I will no doubt come West in the near future. Would you mind suggesting several towns that are liable to want ranch-workers or farmers, and the railroad running through them? I would much prefer a cattle or horse ranch as later on I hope to own one of my own."—B. B. BUCK, JR., Highlands, New Jersey.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—I know of no other place where there is so much varied and profitable ranching as in Imperial Valley. They fatten thousands of cattle there yearly. They raise hogs that run to 700, 800, and in a few cases to 1,000 pounds a piece. They raise immense quantities of cotton, alfalfa, vegetables, melons, forage stuffs of all kinds, poultry, corn, barley, peas, pears, potatoes, olives, cheese and dairy products, turkeys, ostriches, sheep, goats, horses and mules. Two crops a year on much of the land.

R. C. Harner near Holtville raised a crop of barley first and then got seven thousand dollars' worth of corn off two hundred and twenty-six acres last year.

There is much cattle-raising in the upper San Joaquin Valley and Sacramento Valley. Fresno is headquarters for the first, Sacramento for the latter. In Arizona you will find cattle-raising pretty much all over where there is any watered land. In Utah see Cedar Valley on the Salt Lake line. Imperial Valley is on the S. P.

Game in the Fort Fraser Country

Question:—"Two of us with about four hundred dollars would like to go on a hunting trip to British Columbia, around Babine Lake, north of Fort Fraser. What game and furs are to be found there? Do the Indians go as far as the lake to trap and do they resent a stranger coming in there? Which way do we have to go to get there—boat or pack-horse? Do you know anybody living there who could give us information or maps and descriptions of the country?"—GEORGE HIGHHOUSE, Mercer, New Jersey.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The game in the Fort Fraser country consists of bear, deer and rabbit, moose and caribou scarce but still in evidence. The latest report is to the effect that game is getting scarce in this district but this amounts to exactly nothing. One party may go in and have good success while another loses out and blames the country. Beaver are reported to be so plentiful as to be a nuisance, but this sounds rather strong. In any case it is a safe bet that this district is as good as any other, so much depending on the skill of the trapper or hunter.

The Indians will not bother you any. They are an unoffensive lot who would rather loaf than fight. Most of them are engaged in ranching and do not depend on their traps for a livelihood.

Go in from Prince Rupert by way of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Pack-horses may be used for the last part of the trip as there is no lack of feed along the route, but the water transportation is by no means bad, as the entire country is spotted with lakes and rivers.

I do not know any one personally, to whom it would be safe to write in that section. The Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C., will furnish you with maps, survey reports and other data on application and you might also ask him to send you a copy of Game Bulletin No. 17. It is very interesting as well as reliable.

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Mexico—Its Opportunity

Question:—"Can you give me an idea as to any openings which might occur on the Mexican Pacific coast, after the war, for two young men with a few hundred dollars capital? We have both seen the Pacific coast from British Columbia to Panama, just barely seeing the harbors on our trips back and forth. We would like to settle there if there are any kind of prospects. Though neither of us has a fixed trade, we have had a good education and understand all kinds of stock and farms, sign-writing, engineering, and piano-playing. What kinds of farms or ranches are worked around Manzanillo and Acapulco? Does it take much time and capital to run a banana-grove? Are there any prospects on the coastal ships, Mexican or American?"————————, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Answer, by Mr. W. H. Whiteaker:—I see by your letter that you have passed by the Western coast of Mexico and it is a shame that you did not get a chance to stop and view the country. The Pacific coast is not, by far, the best part of that country. I am somewhat partial to the central part.

There is always an opening in that country for an industrious white man who has some capital, but I would advise a white man to keep out of that country until we are sure that everything points to everlasting peace. You could purchase a ranch today from some friend of the present Government and inside of a week another party would spring up from nowhere, and your property would be among the spoils.

It is an awful tedious job and a lot of hard work to get started in growing bananas. It takes seven years of work and worry. It is not much more expensive to get the trees than it is for us up here to start an apple, fig or peach orchard. Owing, of course, to the grade of trees that you get.

Around Manzanillo, the land is so fertile that most of it is used for agriculture, although there is a scattering of a few stock, goats, sheep, and cattle-ranches. The agricultural products are: coffee, sugar, rice, maize, cotton, indigo, tobacco, cocoa-beans, coconuts and also in the fruit line you can see orange, banana, plum, quince, guava, pine-apple and many other kinds.

Manzanillo is one of the oldest towns on the Pacific Coast. Hernando Cortez visited the spot in 1525 and had several vessels built here, with which to explore the Pacific Ocean. Salt mining is of great importance in this State. There are employed about five thousand men in this work, and the annual output is near the half-million dollar mark. The climate is cool and healthy in the north, temperate in the middle or central regions, and is hot and not very healthy in the south and on the coast as it is so hot and unwholesome, from the odor of decaying fish, which are blown out of the streams when the wind is in the right quarter. The harbor is fairly well protected and is regularly visited by ships of the P. M. S. S. Co., The Red Line, The Sinaloa and Durango Rly. Co., and others. Many applications on file for positions.

Acapulco is on the P. M. S. S. Co., Kosmos Line, Compania Naviera del Pacific, and others; is destined to be an important port, is about four hundred and fifty miles from Mexico City. Has a population of about six thousand. Many fine cattle ranches in this region. Wild animals are numerous, among them being: wild boars, wolves, leopard cats, deer, and others. The agricultural products are: vanilla, yuca, cereals, tobacco and many more products. Among the fruits are: lemons, limes bananas, mangoes, pomegranates, and other tropical and sub-tropical.

Many valuable woods—some for dyeing purposes and others for fine furniture. Mining is another important industry.

With your accomplishments I would think that it would be better for you to go to some of the larger cities, where there is a large element of foreigners, to practise, or rather put into practise, your knowledge of sign-writing, piano-playing, and—you did not say what kind of engineering—locomotive, civil, electric, or mining. Engineers are needed in some of the large cities: as Mexico, Monterey, Guadalajara, Vera Cruz, and others.

Canoeing Down the Mississippi

Question:—"Would it be safe for one man to attempt a trip from Beardstown, Illinois, to New Orleans in an eighteen-foot Old Town canoe, by way of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers? I have had six years' experience handling a canoe on the Illinois River at all seasons. I plan to take a light tent and cooking outfit and camp on the way, the trip to take about three months—June, July and August. What sort of troubles am I likely to encounter? What firearms would you advise? I have a Smith and Wesson six-inch heavy-frame 22 caliber target revolver. I thought of taking a .25-20 Winchester, model 1892, rifle in addition. Are there alligators on the Mississippi in Louisiana? What sort of a gun is necessary to kill them?"—W. H. DUNLOP, Rolla, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You could make the trip from up the Illinois to New Orleans in a canoe. It has been done many times, in less safe boats than the one you propose to use—the eighteen-foot Old-Town canoe. My own choice, however, would be a sixteen or eighteen foot skiff—I used such a boat a thousand miles on the Mississippi—as it is safer, one can sleep in it on a canvas stretched from seat to seat, or along the gunwales. However, there is nothing against the canoe, except possible desire to sleep anchored in an eddy, instead of camped on the sand-bars or up the banks. For a three months' trip, a twenty-foot shanty boat would be much more comfortable and you would always have a dry bed.

Mosquitoes and rainstorms and high winds are troubles most to be feared, flies especially, if you have to sleep on land. River tramps, too. Your .22 Smith and Wesson and a .25-20 Winchester would be an admirable team of weapons—take lots of ammunition, and you'll see lots of targets and marks to shoot at, for practise.

Alligators would be fit game for .25-20—smaller ones, at least. They are found as high as St. Francis River. Also Gar, and unprotected animals. Write State game protectors, State capitals.

You'll have the best kind of a time, see a lot of things and meet many pleasing experiences—no better trip anywhere, to my mind.

Summer Work in Maine

Question:—"Will you please give me some information on the chances of a high-school student,

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who is also a Boy Scout, securing a job in a lumber camp during his Summer vacation of July and August. I am about five feet nine inches tall, and weigh about one hundred and thirty-five pounds, and will be eighteen on August seventh. Being a scout I know something about woodcraft and nature. Please tell me about equipment, necessary qualifications, and the pay. The last named is not important. Is there any shooting to be had during these months?"—GEORGE A. RAUCH, Mt. Oliver, Pennsylvania.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There would be small chances of securing a job in a Maine lumber camp during the months of July and August. There will be very little doing at that time in such places. If you wish to come to Maine to work out-of-doors this Summer, you could find plenty to do on the farms in the northern part of the State. There is a great demand for farm help, and a young man would find it more pleasant than in the average Maine lumber camp. There is no shooting at that season of the year, as it is a closed time on all kinds of game.

There has been a man in Bangor this week looking for recruits for the farms in Aroostook County, for this Summer, and promises good wages. All the qualifications necessary, is a good healthy body, and a willing disposition to work. One would be sure of a home in good families, with the best of food and pleasant environment.

On the other hand, in a lumber camp, providing there was work, it would be hard, a pest of mosquitoes, and worst of all no fresh fruit or vegetables.

Canoeing in Canada

Question:—"I am much interested in moose and bear hunting, also trapping, in your territory. Please send me full information on hunting, trapping, fishing, canoeing, Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits, equipment, Hudson's Bay Company posts, timber customs regulations. I am particularly interested in exploring by canoe the most remote regions, so please give me the best routes. What would it cost two men to travel two or three months by canoe, also necessary equipment and food."—GEORGE A. SAMOUCE, Anniston, Ala.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—It is impossible to give you a reply covering the entire field—please read my department of "AA" again.

As stated in the mid-February issue of *Adventure*, for the reasons therein given, I consider Northwestern Quebec the best proposition for moose and bear hunting, and it also offers some splendid canoe-cruising outings.

The enclosed data covers this much more fully than anything possible to give in a letter. Note the leading article in the January number of the *Hunter-Trader-Trapper Magazine* for a description of its big game possibilities.

A wonderful canoe cruise would be, putting in at Nottaway, one hundred and eighty miles east of Cochrane on the Canadian Government Transcontinental Line, going down the Bell route, to Mattagami Lake, thence east through the Gull Lakes, through the Waswanapae country to Mistassini Lake, thence working south through connecting waters out at Lake St. John. This can be done in seven to eight weeks nicely. A guide would be essential, and I can arrange all details for you, if wished. This is a much superior cruise than the so-called "James Bay" trips which from my personal experience I would not recommend for fishing, cruising or scenery.

The above is just one of several virgin cruises in a *real* Hinterland—probably the most virgin outdoors in the North today accessible for such trips.

Trapping is possible—i. e. I mean the fur season is open—only from November on, and for trapping for sport a "Winter Outing" is necessary—in December, January or February.

The question of equipment and food largely depends on the specific trip taken and what time of the year.

Transvaal and Rhodesia

Question:—"Will you give some information regarding Transvaal and Rhodesia. Am a Hollander, can speak English and French besides my own language. Have experience in engineering. Am a fair shot, and used to the life of the trails. Am twenty-six years old, have high-school education.—H. T. KENS, S. Edmonton, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—Your question is rather vague. Get hold of an encyclopedia in a public library and look up the statistics of Transvaal and Rhodesia. They speak de taal in the Transvaal as you probably know, and a little in Rhodesia. There is any amount of engineering jobs all over the country, but you do not give an idea of what your qualifications are. Johannesburg is the mining center and the most likely for a stop-gap job; but if you think of ranching go to Potchefstroom, Middleburg or Bloemfontein for the Transvaal; Buluwayo and Salisbury are centers of both mining and agriculture in Rhodesia. One thousand dollars will not take you far for your fare out, equipment of self and station and stocking a "ranch"; but it would be ample to go out and look around.

Don't buy any equipment here. You will find the exact thing you will require right there and very much cheaper. Two hundred dollars should cover well a good outfit, rifle included. The Lee Enfield (.303) an English rifle is mostly used there and ammunition is easily obtained; for heavy game—lion and elephant—I swear by the .450 Express. A similar caliber in an American gun would do, but cartridges would be less easily replenished. But if you want hunting go to Rhodesia; the Transvaal now is too civilized and cultivated except in the remote regions.

What Australia Offers

Question:—"Have noticed in *Adventure* that you would give information about conditions in Australia and Tasmania. Kindly send it to me.—H. WIRTANEN, Washington, D. C.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—Conditions in Australia:

POLITICAL: A constant turmoil caused by the defeat of conscription which was introduced by the Prime Minister, Mr. W. M. Hughes, former leader of the labor party whose power has been shaken by the radical laborites who opposed the measure.

FINANCIAL: A general slump, so far as new enterprises are concerned, occasioned by the fear of the extreme labor party and of the prevailing industrial unrest. At the same time there is a condition of general stability.

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COMMERCIAL: A healthy condition excepting in so far as commerce has been retarded by restrictions on shipping.

EMPLOYMENT: A continuous demand for skilled mechanics and farm laborers who are well paid. Plenty of work, in fact, for those willing to work, clerical positions however being difficult to get owing to the fact that a greatly increased number of women have entered business life. Full particulars regarding any class of employment may be obtained on application to Mr. F. C. Govers, Director of Immigration, Challis House, Sydney, Australia.

CLIMATE: Generally healthy, no severe cold and severe heat except in the interior. Mild and pleasant on the seaboard though sultry in Summer.

GENERAL FEATURES: Very attractive. A magnificent coast with beautiful bays and harbors permitting of surf bathing, which is the national pastime, for eight or nine months of the year.

LIVING CONDITIONS: Very easy. No conventionality. Australia is truly a democracy.

COST OF LIVING: About on the same level as it is in the United States. Since the war it has increased by about thirty per cent.

West Coast Fishing

Question:—"I am thinking of taking a trip to the West Coast this coming Fall. I would like to get information to wit: *First*—Commercial Fisheries of the Pacific Coast and Alaska; also method of catching the different kinds of fish.

Second—What would it cost to build a schooner-rigged boat, ninety feet over all, for off-shore fishing, and could you tell me how such a kind of a boat is built?

Third—Where could one get a good book on seamanship and navigation?

Fourth—"How is seafaring on fishing vessels of the North Pacific?

Fifth—"Could you give me the name of a shipbuilder who would build such a vessel, and how long a time would it take to build it?"—D. R. MCGILLIVRAY, Fonda, N. D.

Answer, by Mr. Tucker:—The commercial fishing of the State of Washington and Alaska is such a large subject that I am sending you, under separate cover, the State Bulletin on the subject and for very detailed information covering the subject from first to last from the Alaska cod to the California sardine. I would recommend you to send for a copy of the Pacific Fisherman Year Book, published by Miller Freeman of the L. O. Smith Building of Seattle and which will be sent you for one dollar.

The cod-fishing boats will finish outfitting here by the middle of April. The chances of employment on them is good. The halibut schooners are busy up until late in the Fall. The canneries along the coast are somewhat short of men for their fishing boats and the chances of employment there are good.

Fishermen who had shares in the halibut boats this year have made good money. As for your question about building a schooner I hardly know what to say. There are plenty of shipyards here, but they are very busy on large vessels. I think there is a yard in Tacoma run by a man named Troopstad which might be induced to take on such a contract, but without going over there and interviewing him it would be difficult to say. As to the cost of such a boat I can not answer for the conditions brought on by the war have played havoc with prices.

"The Elements of Navigation," by N. J. Henderson, published by Harper, price one dollar and twenty-five cents.

"Seamanship," by G. S. Nares and "The Seaman and His Craft", by W. J. Claxton would probably give you the information you wish. You had better ship on one of the regular boats here first before you try to get into the game on your own account.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE OF ALL THOSE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS

BURNS, ADA. (ROBINSON). Sister. Separated when only two and six years old in England then in an orphanage. Were adopted into different families. Was told my sister had been adopted by a MRS. S. P. BURNS and that she became a trained nurse, last heard of in Canada.—Address MRS. NELLIE LANGEVAIN, 40 Bridge Street, Concord, N. H.

ANDERSON, ALEX. Over 70. A red-headed Scotchman. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif. Well known in Santa Clara Co. Any expenses connected with looking him up will be paid.—Address ALEX JAFFRAY, care of WILKINS, 250 Athol St., Oshawa, Ontario.

YOUKER, PHILIP LUTHER (LOUIS). Age about 32, son of DAVID YOUKER, horse trader, last heard of in Des Moines, Iowa in 1905. Fortune awaiting him in Illinois.—Address W. G. KENT, Attorney, Dixon, Illinois.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MCGOVERN, JOHN. Born in County Cavan, Ireland. Left Schaghticoke, N. Y., on April 10, 1876, with a man named PATRICK HART. Last heard of in El Paso, Texas, 1882. Any information concerning him will be thankfully received by his brother.—Address HUGH MCGOVERN, Schaghticoke, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

REMBE, EDWARD A. Know that you realize that I would not make appeal to you for financial aid if it were not absolutely necessary. The children very seriously need help from you.—Address M. W. REMBE, 505 Oriel Building, 6th and Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

VANCE, THAD. Last heard from in June, 1916, when he sailed from Tampico, Mexico, as a refugee on the U. S. Transport *Sumner* en route for Galveston, Texas. Information desired by relatives.—Address K. L. V., care *Adventure.*

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OFFER, GEORGE WILLIAM. Boilermaker (by trade) about 50 years of age, born at Launceston, Tasmania. At one time on the river at New Orleans in the Pick-me-up trade. His brother would like to know of his whereabouts.—Address THOMAS OFFER, 43 Brisbane St., Launceston, Tasmania.

HILGENHORST, JOHN. (JOHN SILVESTER GRAEGORY). Left home seven years ago. Last heard from three years ago in Arizona. Brown hair, brown eyes and dark complexion. Mother is brokenhearted.—Address MRS. J. HILGENHORST, 115 So. 2nd St., Paterson, N. J.

LINDEGREN, MISS ESTELL and MR. ERNEST LINDEGREN. Would like to know the address. Last heard from living in Timberdale farm somewhere in the State of Kansas. Kindly send information to—ALBERT WANGLUND, 551 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

GRANVILLE, RICHARD, "LINDERFELDT," "CAPT. KING," "LEE," "DAD BIDDLE" and the rest of the American Legion that was in Mexico. Where are you?—Address "POWDER JESS", care *Adventure*.

ARBUCKLE, MARGARET. Last heard from in Denver, 1914. Send your address to EMMA ARBUCKLE, 546 Locust St., Long Beach, Calif.

SALTMAN, WILLIAM. Age seventeen, chauffeur. Last heard of in Sacramento, Calif. Please communicate with mother.—Address MRS. ANNIE SALTMAN, 626 3rd St., Portland, Oregon.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First June or Mid-June issue of *Adventure*. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

AUBREY; Bargery, William; Brandel, Jack; Carroll, James W.; Castle, Edward Moses; Copp, Ed.; Curtiss, Marion; Dankel, Henry; Dattle, Arthur; Fisher, William Wright; Griffin, Tom; Hainze, Eugene; Harmon, H. E.; Hilliard, Leon; Honifer, Gus; Kelly, R. E.; King Rodrick Barlo; King, Vance Herald; Kleinle, Erving Louis; Louis, Clayton J.; Lucas, Jo.; McCord, John; McInnes, Frank J.; McKay, Florence; Moomaw, Arthur; Moomaw, Eugene; Ohare, Rose; Park, John P.; Pendergrass, C. F.; Poynter, Louis; Rogerson, Wm. L.; Rutstein, Joe; Sands, Clifford W.; Shannon, William (Uncle); Shannon, James (Father); Sharrock, Joseph P.; Slavin, Corp. J. Dallas; Stroman, Edwin F. (Chey); Todd, Theodore W.; Vreeland; Weil, Gustav; Young, William McKinley.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays.—JACK P. ROBINSON.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Below we give you those features at present booked for the Mid-July issue, in your hands June 18th.

The Survivor *By Robert V. Carr*

This complete novel is a grim, powerful love-story of broad Western range-lands and the Great American Desert.

For the Flag *Part II* *By Thomas Addison*

Swift action, unfaltering courage, undying Yankee patriotism. A tale of Central America and an American who dared everything for his country. Read the first instalment of this great serial and you'll not miss the second.

A Prevaricated Parade *By W. C. Tuttle*

Independence Day in Paradise! The celebration starts at 12.01 A.M. Don't miss it. You'll meet your old friends from every ranch for fifty miles 'round.

A Fish Story About Love *By Harold Titus*

You who thrill at the strike of a five-pounder and the sing of a reel as old bronze-back rushes toward deep water—here's a yarn of a broad, cold, crystal stream and of those who fled to it from prison office walls of brick and steel.

The Twelve Padlocks *By Carroll K. Michener*

Crafty East meets shrewd, calculating West. You will find the mystery and cunning of the Orient locked in the great iron chest by the twelve padlocks.

The Skidi Feed the Evening Star *By Hugh Pendexter*

Another stirring Indian tale of those fearless warriors of the Western plains, the Pawnees.

On Short Allowance *By E. S. Pladwell*

With dynamite and powder in the hold and a rotten deck underfoot *Riley* takes you on a startling voyage down the hurricane-swept Pacific.

The Trail at Landry *By Nevil G. Henshaw*

We're all glad of this chance to read another of Mr. Henshaw's stories of the quaint, whole-hearted folk who live in the little-known hinterland of Louisiana; also to welcome him back to *Adventure*.

Off the Course *By Roy P. Churchill*

Arab is just a dog. But he means a lot to the crew of the U. S. Warship *Glouster*. If you like a dog and like the sea, you'll vote this yarn a winner.

The Pearl of Torres *By Louis Esson*

Concerning those daring, bronze-faced men who hunt wealth in the far out-places of the earth—this time the Torres Straits.

ADVENTURE, MID-JULY ISSUE

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